

IN SEARCH OF A MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract: The paper deploys from the holistic perception of modelling as an effective way to comprehend, discuss, teach or manage complicated matters. The design of a model starts with breaking down the discussed phenomenon into bite size chunks, which are then abstracted and surveyed. The outcome is a simplified version of the chunks called a model, whose main application is to enable studying of the complicated matters and to help construct scientific concepts on them. Modelling and conceptualization are often applied in different scientific fields, including intercultural communication and required competence, for compiling conceptual models that represent theoretical reasoning structured and easier to understand. However, in many cases the notions of "model", "concept" and "graphical representation" are used synonymously and as a consequence the term “a conceptual model” of intercultural competence refers to both the theoretical content itself and its graphic image. In addition, the academic literature offers a rich variety not only of visual representations but also of definitions on this topic such as intercultural adaptation, cultural sensitivity, global citizenship, and intercultural efficiency, based on the branch of interest of the specific scientist. Finding grounds in some previous studies on the topic, this article integrates some concepts and offers another point of view on the theoretical discussion and definition of intercultural competence. Firstly, the paper discusses basic principles in the synthesis and visualization of diagrams according to the Polish philosopher Alfred Tarsky's Theory of Models and thus introduces a more structured approach to modelling. Secondly, according to the presented rules, it analyses several models on intercultural competence, published in the scientific literature and classifies them by applying the dialectical approach to intercultural communication as proposed by Martin and Nakayama. Against this background, the article finally discusses and evaluates the characteristics of the "Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence" based on the basic principles of "Theory of Models" and applying the dialectical point of view to the analysis of communication processes in a multicultural environment. The discussed model was applied to study the development of intercultural competence in multicultural teams with cross-border projects within the Romania - Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Program 2007-2013. The survey uses both qualitative and quantitative methods, all based on the model. This coherence in conceptualization and modelling leads to the conclusion that "The Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence" can be considered a serious contribution to adopting a more coherent approach to the study of intercultural competence. This model can be useful not only for understanding the subject matter but also for designing artificial intelligence software.

Keywords: intercultural, competence, model, dialectical approach

В ТЪРСЕНЕ НА МОДЕЛ НА ИНТЕРКУЛТУРНА КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТ

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Статията е изградена върху холистичното възприемане на моделирането като ефективен начин за разбиране, обсъждане, преподаване или управление на сложна материя. Проектирането на един модел започва с разделянето на реалния обект или процес на малки части, които се изследват отделно. В резултат се получава опростена версия на отделните елементи, наречена модел, чието основно приложение е да улесни изучаването на сложната материя и да подпомогне изграждането на научни концепции върху нея. Моделирането и концептуализацията често се прилагат в различни научни области, включително и при изучаването на интеркултурната комуникация и необходимите компетентности, за съставяне на концептуалните модели, които представят теоретичните разсъждения структурирано и по-лесно разбираемо. В много случаи понятията "модел", "концепция" и "графично представяне" се използват синонимно и като следствие под концептуален модел на интеркултурната компетентност се разбира както теоретичната постановка, така и графичното и онагледяване. Освен това академичната литература предлага богато разнообразие не само на визуални представяния, но и на дефиниции по тази тема като межкултурната

адаптация, културната чувствителност, глобалното гражданство и межкултурната ефикасност, основани на отразяване на интереса на конкретния учен. Познавайки се на предишни изследвания по темата, статията обединява някои понятия и предлага друга гледна точка към теоретичната дискусия и дефинирането на интеркултурната компетентност. В началото тя обсъжда основните принципи при синтеза и визуализацията на диаграми според "Теория на моделите" на полския философ Алфред Тарски и по този начин въвежда структуриран подход към моделирането. След това, според представените правила, статията анализира няколко популярни модела на интеркултурна компетентност, публикувани в научната литература и ги класифицира чрез прилагане на диалектическия подход към интеркултурната комуникация, предложен от Мартин и Накаяма. В края разработката обсъжда и оценява характеристиките на "Интегрирания процесен модел на интеркултурната компетентност", изграден върху основните принципи на "Теория на моделите" и прилагащ диалектическата гледна точка към анализа на комуникационните процеси в мултикултурна среда. Обсъжданият модел е приложен за проучване на изграждането на интеркултурна компетентност в мултикултурните екипи, реализирали трансгранични проекти в рамките на Програма за трансгранично сътрудничество Румъния - България 2007-2013 г. Изследването използва както качествени, така и количествени методи, всички базирани на модела. Тази последователност при концептуализирането и моделирането води до заключението, че "Интегрираният процесен модел на интеркултурната компетентност" може да се счита за сериозен принос към приемане на по-систематизиран подход към проучването на интеркултурната компетентност. Моделът може да бъде полезен не само за разбирането на изучаваната материя, но и за проектирането на софтуер за изкуствен интелект.

Ключови думи: интеркултурна, компетентност, модел, диалектически подход

1. INTRODUCTION

Undertakings across national borders pose the question of how meaningful and effective communication in this new environment is. Shortly after the first international encounters, it becomes evident that, what is common and accepted for a professional from one country could be very different for a colleague from overseas. When acknowledged this variety in perceptions, beliefs, norms and values in different cultures, leads to the question of the needed competence to recognize and understand differences. The more common international developments become, the more and more audiences are looking for an accessible and unified way of learning skills for more effective communication in diversified cultural environment. Students, business people and international experts, working in multicultural teams understand that it is necessary to explore the influence of cultures on personal behavior in order to comprehend how they affect professional communication. A great number of them are striving to find ways to better manage their intercultural discourses and improve their intercultural competence. In this sense, a well structured conceptualization of the communication process, corresponding modelling and visual representation, regardless of the field of application, will provide an insight on how to manage and improve it. Thus the main purpose of this article is to discuss the "Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence" [6] as an ultimate search result for a model, which finds grounds in the dialectical approach to intercultural communication process and related competence as presented by Martin and Nakayama [2], and coherently builds on this perspective to assemble a model and translate it into a graphic representation.

2. SHORT OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS ON THE SCIENTIFIC PROBLEM

Firstly, the article offers a very short overview of previous publications on the topic. In the academic literature the concept of intercultural competence is discussed from a variety of perspectives. As Spitzberg and Shannon point out [5], this diversity generates a variety of terms, ranging from cultural competence, communication competence, intercultural adaptation, cultural sensitivity, global citizenship, intercultural efficiency. By the 1990s, these concepts would mainly focus on adaptability, but since then a more complex and holistic approach to discussing intercultural competence has been adopted [5]. In the last 30 years, research efforts have delved into the study of complex conceptual models related to a specific field of application: training, education, health services, organizational development. For example, Spitzberg and Shannon [5] present more than 20 definitions and models, developed by researchers from the Western Hemisphere alone. They group the discussed concepts as: complex, inter-orientational, adaptational, and patterns showing development and causal relationship. At the same time, it is important to note that Spitzberg and Changnon [5] use the terms "model", "concept" and "graphical representation" synonymously and interchangeably in their exhaustive description of contemporary models.

Which are these topical models of intercultural competence? It should be clearly stated, that most of the concepts were developed with the view of their application in a specific scientific field. For example, the Model of Byram focuses on the development of intercultural competence in studying English as a second language. Another popular concept is Bennett's Model, which is applied to construct training modules under the title 'Developmental Intercultural Competence Model'. To continue, Spitzberg and Changnon [5] also discuss two models, developed by Deardorff based on a Delphi methodology: a pyramid and a process ones, the latter also known as the Spiral model [8], which are used to support language learning. As the authors point out, 'there is no shortage' of approaches or concepts on the topic.

Nevertheless, in search of a more structured way to modelling intercultural competence, the article offers the "Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence" [6]. This 'search result' appears when evaluating coherence between conceptualization, modelling and a graphic representation on the topic.

3. DISCUSSION ON THE SEARCH RESULT

At this stage, the article presents some definitions or 'building blocks' to structure the process of conceptualization of intercultural competence. These provisional explanations include discussions on terms like: concepts, models and diagrams and their interrelations.

3.1 Definitions of the building blocks

Concepts

Scientific concepts or conceptual systems (theories) serve as the explanation of the studied phenomenon or its mental representation. They are cognitive tools that provide the ability of systematic cognition of the discussed matter. Conceptualization asks for theoretical consistency when analysing the studied phenomenon and presenting the main ideas. In the case with intercultural communication and competence, it means that the same principles to examining culture and intercultural communication should be applied when discussing intercultural competence acquired in the communication process. One such principle might be the process approach, because, just like Spitzberg and Changnon [5] state throughout their study, all theoretical explanations of human activity imply and have to cope with the complexity of a process and all concepts of intercultural competence somehow presuppose the notion of a process. This process approach, one of the principles of the dialectic point of view to analysing intercultural communication [3], is built-in the discussed concept behind the "Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence" [6].

Models

When outline concepts, it is the descriptive approach that is often used, which however, might be too vague or difficult to understand. Thus a simplified version of the topic, called a model, could be more helpful and easier-to-grasp. This simplification or modelling involves breaking down the discussed matter into bite size chunks, which are then abstracted and surveyed. Once the 'bits' are examined, it becomes necessary to assemble them in a meaningful and acceptable way in accordance with the initial concept. At this stage, it becomes vital to follow widely accepted principles of assembly such as these presented in the "Theory of models" by the Polish scientist Alfred Tarsky [1,2]. The author applies the mathematical approach and boolean logic in developing the basic definitions and rules used to construct models as logical structures. Based on this theory, Balboni [2] further proposes the following declarations:

- A model should be valid and applicable to all possible manifestations of the described phenomenon. For example, a model of intercultural competence should be justifiable and correct in either high-context or low-context cultures.
- Models could be complex or basic, whereas the complex would be constructed from basic ones hierarchically. The hierarchical levels are laid according to the interaction of the constituent factors [2].
- Models are based on declarative rules and procedures. Declarative rules describe the pivot points of the model, while the procedures are descriptions of the interaction of declarative rules with other rules or models. This interaction produces a corresponding result, expressed as: "if then ..." [2].

Diagrams

Models are visually described by diagrams or graphic representations, which use a set of predined shapes, the so-called "icons" or "blocks" and connecting arrows. To prevent ambiguity or misinterpretation, these constructive elements should be provisionally explained and closely connected with the declarative rules and procedures of the model. Such a connection presupposes that the same concept, used to explain the phenomena and build the model, should be illustrated graphically to produce a logical and consistent structure.

Having briefly described the ‘building blocks’ to conceptualize the process of acquiring intercultural competence, the article discusses how they are featured in the concept of the “Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence” [6].

3.2 Featuring the ‘building blocks’ behind the ‘Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence’

The first noticeable feature is the application of the dialectical approach to discuss the process of intercultural communication, as described by Martin and Nakayama [3]. Then the same conceptual point of view is applied in modelling of the phenomenon and further interpreted in its visualization.

Martin and Nakayama [3] state the applicability of the dialectical approach to conceptualize the ever-changing nature of human relations by outlining its three paradigms:

- 1) It examines the process in development and outlines the dynamic nature of relationships, which enables the intercultural communication research to provide not only static but also a dynamic picture of interaction between cultural groups [4].
- 2) The dialectical approach takes into account the relational aspect of intercultural communication, namely the interconnections between its different aspects and examines them holistically (jointly) and not separately.
- 3) The third characteristic of the dialectical perspective is the simultaneous discussion of controversial ideas. According to Martin and Nakayama [4], it is directly related to the controversial nature of intercultural communication and covers various types of intercultural knowledge.

When discussing the process of acquiring intercultural competence, Bebenova-Nikolova applies these three principles of the dialectical approach in the following way:

Firstly, *the process-oriented approach* - since intercultural communication is a process of human interactions, this process could be broken down into two ‘chunks’, which broadly include all possible stages of communication from cognitive and behavioral perspectives. Modelling this concept, asks for the introduction of two dichotomous parts ‘cognition/ mind’ and ‘performance/behavior’. Such a suggestion is coherent with the dialectic paradigm of the *simultaneous discussion of controversial ideas*, which accepts that “reality can be at once external and internal, that human behavior is predictable and creative and changeable” [3]. Balboni and Caon previously used the idea of the dichotomous modelling, when constructing their “Performance-Oriented Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence” [1].

In the graphic presentation, the process orientation is conveyed by using a flow chart diagram with blocks for the different components, linked by arrows, which lead forward and backward to indicate process and continuity. In Fig.1 two square blocks “Mind (construct)” and “World (performance)” are introduced and the interrelation between them is visualised by the dotted lines, which symbolize the outer frame of the process.

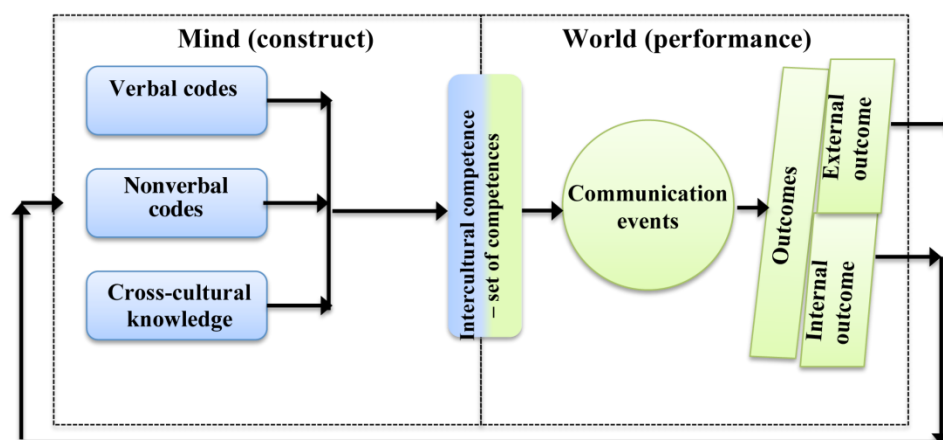


Figure 1 Integrated Process Model on Intercultural Competence (Bebenova-Nikolova, 2016)

Secondly, the discussed concept accepts that depending on the communication stage, the intercultural competence as a personal feature could be viewed both as part of the mindset/construct and as a way of behavior/performance. Therefore, when examining the phenomena, this modelling provides for a "static snapshot" either of the cognition (the block "Mind-Construct" with the Intercultural competence) or of the demonstrated behavior (then the IC is part of the block "World-Performance") without contradicting the process-oriented conceptual approach. In the graphic presentation this notion is expressed by introducing the "Intercultural competence" component on the border between the two dichotomous blocks. Also following the *principle of the holistic examination of the phenomenon with the interconnections between its different aspects*, the component can be viewed as a set of competences, needed to transfer professional, strategic, social and personal competence areas into the specific communication event in order to produce some results. Visually this idea is presented by the introduction of the rectangle "Intercultural competence - a set of competences" on the dotted line between the two modules. Then, based on the principle of the 'drop-down menus', the component could be further detailed in regard to the area of survey. This flexibility provides more freedom of application for various research purposes, like language learning, teaching or working in multicultural teams and in a variety of intercultural encounters.

Thirdly, *based on the holistic approach*, the discussed concept implies that the unity between the construct (knowledge) and the performance (behavior) of intercultural competence is realized in communication events with certain outcomes. The latter could be very tangible and obvious or/and could be hidden and connected with subsequent mental processing of the communication impact. Visually presenting this part of the model asks for the introduction of the block "Outcomes" as a parallelogram, which, by using the drop-down menu could be additionally detailed as "Internal and External outcomes". In flow-charts the shape of parallelogram is used to indicate either the beginning of the process or the final result of it. The reflection on these two types of results produces mental constructs and leads to enrichment of competences. This is how the Model integrates Deardorff's idea of intercultural reflection, discussed in the Spiral model [8] Graphically, this interrelation is presented by an arrow, coming out of the "Outcomes" parallelogram and leading backward to the "Mind(construct)". The latter is related with the knowledge of a language or languages (verbal codes), nonverbal communicative tools and comparative knowledge on cultural systems. Visually, these components are represented by rectangular blocks: "Verbal codes", "Nonverbal codes" and "Cross-cultural knowledge" in the "Mind(construct)".

The adoption of the *relational principle of the dialectic approach* leads to the notion of the importance of cross-cultural knowledge as a basis for generating cognitive patterns in intercultural communication. It is necessary to know not only the in-group culture but also the values and beliefs of other cultures in order comprehend the possible hidden meaning of communication. Therefore, the discussed model uses the "Cross-cultural knowledge" block in comparison to the "cultural values" block in the Balboi research [1].

Finally, using the declarative rules and procedures, which define a model, as described in [2], the "Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence" [6] could be read as:

"If intercultural competence, as a set of competences, including the competence over the "grammar" of verbal and non-verbal codes and cross-cultural values, is performed in the communication process, then it produces outcomes, externally evaluated and personally reflected on and enriches those same codes and cross-cultural values."

Now following the requirements of the Theory of Models [1], it could be argued that the graphic presentation of the Model is:

- Economical: There are six blocks, three of which are homomorphic, connected to a heteromorphic module "Mind/construct" and two other heteromorphic blocks (Communication events, Outcomes) that are part of the "World/ Performance" module. This structure makes the model easy to remember. The arrows themselves are symbolic of the procedures and take action in the right or the opposite direction when the communicative event occurs.
- Simplified: The model uses blocks (rectangles and parallelograms) that represent databases - critical points in intercultural communication and a circle, which stands for heteromorphic acts.
- In-depth structure: it is possible to examine the contents of each of the blocks separately, ie. each of the blocks could have a corresponding table of contents, depending on the area of study or application as in [7].

CONCLUSIONS

The article discusses the "Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence" [6] as a well-structured conceptualization of intercultural competence, which is grounded in the dialectical approach to intercultural

communication process. The featured theoretical concept and the Model itself were also operationalized to design qualitative and quantitative survey tools [7]. After validation and testing for reliability, the research tools were put in use in an empirical study to assess the components of the intercultural communication in multicultural teams. The results of the study prove its applicability and validity [9].

This coherence in conceptualization and modelling leads to the conclusion that the “Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence” can be considered a serious contribution to adopting a more coherent approach to the study of intercultural competence regardless of the scientific field. This model can be useful not only for researching the subject matter but also for designing software for machine intelligence.

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