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## CHALLENGES OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN UNEQUAL CULTURAL AWARENESS CONTEXTS

***Abstract:** the article emphasizes that cultural differences remain central to ICC research, influencing language use, behavior, and professional practices. It also reviews theoretical models, particularly those of Michael Byram and Milton Bennet, which stress the importance of intercultural attitudes, sensitivity and awareness. Overall, the paper suggests that while awareness of cultural differences is essential, it is not sufficient on its own. There is a need for further research into skills and strategies that help manage communication in situations where intercultural competence levels are unequal.*

***Keywords:** cultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, cultural differences, communication.*

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## ПРОБЛЕМЫ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ В УСЛОВИЯХ НЕРАВНОГО УРОВНЯ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ОСВЕДОМЛЕННОСТИ

***Аннотация:** в статье подчеркивается, что культурные различия остаются центральным элементом исследований межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции, оказывая влияние на использовании языка, поведение и профессиональные практики. Также рассматриваются теоретические модели, в частности модели Майкла Байрама и Милтона Беннета, которые акцентируют внимание на важности межкультурных установок, чувствительности и осведом-*

ленности. В целом в работе делается вывод о том, что осведомленность о культурных различиях является необходимым, но недостаточным условием. Существует потребность в дальнейших исследованиях навыков и стратегий, способствующих эффективному управлению коммуникацией в ситуациях неравного уровня межкультурной компетенции.

**Ключевые слова:** культурная осведомленность, межкультурная чувствительность, культурные различия, коммуникация.

In recent decades, extensive and highly valuable research on intercultural communicative competence has been conducted across a wide range of contexts, drawing on theoretical and methodological approaches from multiple academic disciplines, including linguistics, communication studies, sociology, and applied linguistics. A central aim of this research has been to identify, categorize, and critically analyze the specific difficulties that emerge in intercultural communication, particularly those that become visible only when individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact. These difficulties are often less frequently observed, or in some cases entirely absent, in communication within a single cultural group, where shared norms, expectations, and communicative conventions tend to reduce ambiguity and misunderstanding. Alongside this diagnostic focus, a significant strand of research has also been devoted to exploring possible strategies, pedagogical approaches, and interactional techniques that may contribute to the effective management or resolution of such communicative challenges in real-life intercultural encounters.

Individuals with lower level of intercultural competence are frequently insufficiently aware of cultural variation and the underlying reasons that shape communicative behavior across cultures, including differences in discourse organization, politeness conventions, turn-taking patterns, levels of directness or indirectness, and broader pragmatic norms governing interaction. As a consequence, as noted by [3] individuals often tend to transfer communicative behavior patterns that are deeply rooted in their native language and cultural environment into the context of foreign language. While these behaviors maybe fully appropriate, meaningful and socially acceptable within

their cultural framework, they may not correspond to, or may even conflict with, the communicative norms expected in the target language community. One illustrative example of this phenomenon can be observed in differing attitudes toward interrupting speakers during conversation, where what is considered a normal sign of engagement in one culture may be interpreted as impolite or disruptive in another.

Furthermore, it is not uncommon for individuals with lower intercultural competence to form negative or evaluative judgements regarding communicative practices that belong to other linguistics and cultural systems and appear unfamiliar, unexpected, or even counterintuitive to them, despite their ability to function linguistically in those languages. Such judgements often emerge not from linguistic deficiency, but from deeper differences in culturally embedded expectations concerning politeness, appropriateness, and acceptable behavioral norms in interaction. Over time, this evaluative tendencies may reinforce simplified or stereotypical interpretations of other communicative styles, thereby influencing the quality of intercultural engagement and potentially limiting the development of more flexible and context-sensitive communicative competence.

Individuals with a highly developed level of intercultural communicative competence – particularly those who poses deep awareness of cultural differences and a well-developed sensitivity to variation in communicative norms – may, at an intellectual level, be fully capable of understanding and interpreting such situations in a theoretically accurate and analytically consistent manner, yet in real communicative practice they ay still experience emotional discomfort, frustration or a sense of dissatisfaction when interacting with participants who demonstrate a lower level of intercultural competence and whose communicative behavior remains strongly influenced by their native linguistic and cultural norms. At the same time, the mere cognitive understanding of these differences does not automatically translate into the availability or effective deployment of the practical skills, interactional techniques, and adaptive strategies required to ensure that communication can be managed in a way that is satisfactory for both parties involved in the interaction, particularly in situations where expectations, communicative conventions, and pragmatic norms diverge significantly.

A significant portion of research on intercultural communicative competence is grounded in the concept of “cultural difference”. Although this approach is often examined alongside related dimensions such as cultural power, identity and stereotyping, the notion of cultural difference continues to occupy a central position in the field. Within this context, cultural difference implies that, regardless of how broadly the concept of “culture” is defined, different cultural groups tend to exhibit, at a given point in time, distinct norms in terms of values, behaviors and shared narratives that shape their communicative practices and social expectations.

The scope of these differences discussed in the literature is extremely wide and multidimensional. Key areas of investigation include variations in value systems and their relationship to language use, differences in pragmatic features of both written and spoken discourse [1], as well as variations in professional and organizational practices across cultural settings. Such differences frequently lead to psychological states such as cognitive dissonance, which in turn contribute to a wide range of intercultural communication difficulties and misunderstandings [2].

Complimenting this line of inquiry is another important research direction focused on identifying and explaining the competences required to effectively manage and navigate these differences. These competences have been examined both in general intercultural communication contexts [4] and in more specialized professional domains such as translation and tourism [5], where intercultural interaction is a constant and structurally embedded feature of professional practice.

One of the most influential approaches in this field has been developed by Michael Byram, who, both in his individual research and in the work carried out within the framework of the Council of Europe, emphasizes the concept of “intercultural attitudes” as a central element of intercultural competence. These attitudes are characterized by openness, curiosity and a readiness to question both one’s own cultural assumptions and those of others. They also involve the capacity to relativize ones values and beliefs rather than treating them as universal truths, as well as the ability to interpret them from alternative cultural perspectives, a process often describes as “decentering” [6].

A similar conceptual framework is reflected in Milton J. Bennet's Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity [7], which describes six stages through which individuals perceive their own cultural reality in relation to others. The lower stages are ethnocentric in nature, where one's own culture is perceived as central, and other cultures are either ignored, misunderstood, or rejected. The higher stages, in contrast, reflect a relativistic orientation, in which individuals recognize the legitimacy of different cultural realities and demonstrate respect through adaptation, interaction and learning.

Within the context of the present discussion, the previously mentioned levels of awareness of cultural differences are directly connected to these theoretical constructs, namely intercultural sensitivity and intercultural attitudes. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, this dimension can be referred to as cultural "awareness".

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