

## **Integrated Process Model on Intercultural Competence**

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**Abstract:** The paper proposes an integrated model on intercultural competence, which attempts to present intercultural communication and competence from the term point of the dialectical approach, described by Martin and Nakayama (2010). The suggested concept deploys from previously developed and accepted models, both structure-oriented and process-oriented. At the same time it replies to the principles of the “Theory of Models” as outlined by Balboni and Caon (2014). In the near future, the model will be applied to assess intercultural competence of cross-border project teams, working under the CBC program between Romania – Bulgaria 2007-2014.

**Keywords:** Intercultural; Competence; Model; Dialectic

### **1. Introduction**

The paper uses the term “Model” in the meaning of “Conceptual Model”, which often relates with “Theory”. Until recently most of the theories in Intercultural Communication and Competence were mainly verbal or descriptive. During the last 30 years, there have been different attempts to shift to a more schematic approach to describing phenomena, which resulted in schemes that are valid on a purely logical basis, independent from empirical measurability.

Following this tradition, the paper proposes such a Model, which meets the principles of “the Theory of Models”, by Alfred Tarski as outlined by Balboni and Caon (Balboni & Caon, 2014). The suggested concept integrates some of the ideas incorporated in the Performance-Oriented Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Balboni & Caon, 2014) as well as in the Process – Oriented Model of Deardorff (Deardorff, 2006).

With the above said in mind, the search for such a model is generated by the dialectical approach to Intercultural Communication and Competence, described by Martin and Nakayama (Martin & Nakayama, 2010), which emphasizes the processual, relational and contradictory nature of interactions.

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## **2. Related Work**

The paper acknowledges the great number of studies on Intercultural Competence (IC), including concepts, which propose a methodology to assess it mainly. Some of these theories and their relevant models were designed for specific professional fields, namely Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 1997) for teaching purposes or Bennett's Intercultural Development Inventory (Bennett 1998) for describing the stages of a training process. Most importantly, the paper follows some ideas from Balboni and Caon's (Balboni & Caon, 2014) as well as from Deardorff's concepts (Deardorff, 2006) (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008).

## **3. Problem Statement**

The paper attempts to define such a model of IC, which not only gives an answer to the question 'What does it take to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations', but applies the dialectical approach to the analysis of intercultural competence and communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). As described by the authors, this specific perspective implies three major paradigms: 1) focus on the process; 2) consideration of relational aspect of intercultural communication and link with intercultural competence; 3) simultaneous discussion of controversial ideas.

Also the suggested model needs to meet the Principles of the "Theory of Models" by Alfred Tarksi as outlined in the paper on 'Performance-oriented Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence' (Balboni & Caon, 2014).

## **4. Concepts**

### **4.1. The Concept of "Communicative Competence"**

Currently, if the words "model" and "communicative competence" are googled together, the search will find a pile of conceptualized models on various competences related with culture. In fact the study of Intercultural Competence became the focus of scientific research by the mid 90s, when the academics accepted the concept of Dell Hymes for communicative competence instead of the term used by Chomsky language/linguistic competence (Balboni & Caon, 2014). The accepted change meant a shift from prioritizing the "knowledge of language, grammar of the language" to "using these grammars within the communicative event" (Balboni & Caon, 2014). This approach expresses the understanding that knowledge of the language alone is not sufficient for effective communication, the latter requires additional skills.

#### **4.2. The “Theory of Models”**

As far as models are concerned, we should point out some of the underlining principles of the “Theory of Models”, introduced by the Polish philosopher Alfred Tarski, as outlined in by Balboni and Caon (Balboni & Caon, 2014). Tarski defined “a model as a true, therefore perpetually valid, interpretation of a linguistic or of a mathematical formulation” (Balboni & Caon, 2014).

Based on this theory, the authors point out the following basic considerations when constructing a model:

- “A model is a structure that includes all possible manifestations of the described phenomenon” (Balboni & Caon, 2014). For example, if we talk about a model of intercultural competence, this model should be applied to the description of competence in any high-context or low-context cultures, during any cultural encounters and at any time.
- Models might be complex (and have heirarchical layers in depth) or basic (no layers). In heirarchical complex models, presenting complicated phenomena, each layer downward describes less complex concepts, presented as model components. This top-down layer approach can be reversed to bottom-up structuring by using simple components (basic models), which interact in a heirarchical order to form connected layers and build up a more complex construct.
- “Models are based on declarations and procedures” (Balboni & Caon, 2014). Declarative rules describe the pillars of the model by using a statement or a term. When these rules interact they produce procedures and relevant results, which can be described by using the construct: “if..... then...”. (Balboni & Caon, 2014).
- “In theoretical sciences, models produce declaratory knowledge (which is self-referential), in operational sciences they produce procedural” (Balboni & Caon, 2014). For example, the model of Intercultural Communicative Competence by Balboni and Caon might be used by behavioural sciences to analyse how and what stages are needed to pass through in order to generate a culturally-competent behavior. At the same time it can be used to discuss the components of “Cultural values”.
- The diagrams are used to visually present the models in order to reduce linguistic ambiguity. They consist of the so-called “icons” or “boxes”, which acquire a previously prescribed meaning to become non-ambiguous. Thus they activate three different forms of intelligence: the logical-formal, the linguistic, and the spatial intelligences (Balboni & Caon, 2014), which definitely descreases the possibility of misinterpretation and ambiguity.

According to Balboni and Caon, (Balboni & Caon, 2014) each model should meet three basic requirements:

- **Economy** - It should use the minimum possible icons or boxes so that it can be easily remembered and applied. This comes to say that the top level of the model should be simple, while each component should provide for further examination and explanation, similar to the 'drop-down' menus used in software (Balboni & Caon, 2014).
- **Reliability** - The reliability of a model is determined by the accuracy of the information contained therein, i.e. the model must be correct. As the authors state: "This is why empirically validated models are no longer the only models to be considered reliable, as validation or falsification of a model's reliability can be logical prior to be empirically possible." (Balboni & Caon, 2014). This comes to say that confirmation of the validity of the model can be performed using formal logic, which doesn't exclude empirical tests.
- **Simple structure, hierarchy in case of a complex phenomenon** - The structure of the model should be simplified so as to facilitate its application especially in such a pragmatic-oriented scientific field as intercultural communication. This requires the number of the boxes to be no more than seven, the links between them to be logical and to secure easy-to-follow tracking process. Complicated models should be presented by in-depth structures.

### **4.3. Discussed Models of Intercultural Competence**

The paper discusses two such models, which were selected based on their coherence with the above described principles.

#### **4.3.1. Balboni and Caon's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence**

The first one (Figure 1), the model of Intercultural Communicative Competence takes into account: the term 'communicative competence' proposed by Hymes (Hymes, 1972), the model of Communicative Competence in a language as well as the 'model for monitoring the critical points in intercultural communication' and presents the structure of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Balboni & Caon, 2014).

The whole diagram is based on the dichotomy 'Mind, competence' and 'World, performance', presented on the Figure 1. On the model from left to right, the declarative rules are visualised through four boxes, three of which are part of the 'Mind, competence' and the fourth is in the middle, and one circle, part of the 'World, performance'. Two of the boxes represent the components 'Language' and 'Extra-linguistic codes', including a set of elements and rules for their use and combination (grammar). The third box is named 'Cultural value' and holds the critical points of communication. The final pillar of the model is the circle 'Communicative events', which is open to integrate additional elements that meet the specifics of any cultural group or community. It is situated in the module 'World, performance' to demonstrate the objective existence of the events but

linked with the box 'Language abilities, Behaviour abilities' to show the point where intercultural communication happens. This central complex element contains not only language abilities (cognitive processes) and skills (the implementation of abilities), but also the abilities and skills of appropriate behaviour in Intercultural Communication, which were proposed by Caon as a qualifying aspect of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Balboni & Caon 2010). The operational rules are presented by double pointed arrows to indicate how the separate boxes are interlinked and mutually impact each other.

Following is the analysis of the model against the model theory requirements as described above:

- Economy - The model has an economic structure, consisting of five elements, four of which are homomorphic (have similar shapes) but connect with one heteromorphic element. Such economic layout makes the model easy to track and remember. Simple structure - The square boxes represent complex homogeneous databases with theoretical knowledge which needs further explanation. The arrows indicate that the rules take effect when communication events happen. The shape of the block "Communicative events" is different because it is heterogeneous and includes a variety of events arising from the law (ie arrows left) and cultural norms that characterize different types of events such as meetings, dinners, group work, lectures, etc. (Balboni & Caon, 2014). At the same time the model is structured in layers and allows for further examination of the boxes' content by a drop-down menu, listing the sub-components of the 'grammar'. Hence each of the boxes can be studied separately to clarify the relevant contents.
- Reliability - The reliability of the model can be estimated with empirical observation during any communication event (Balboni & Caon, 2014).

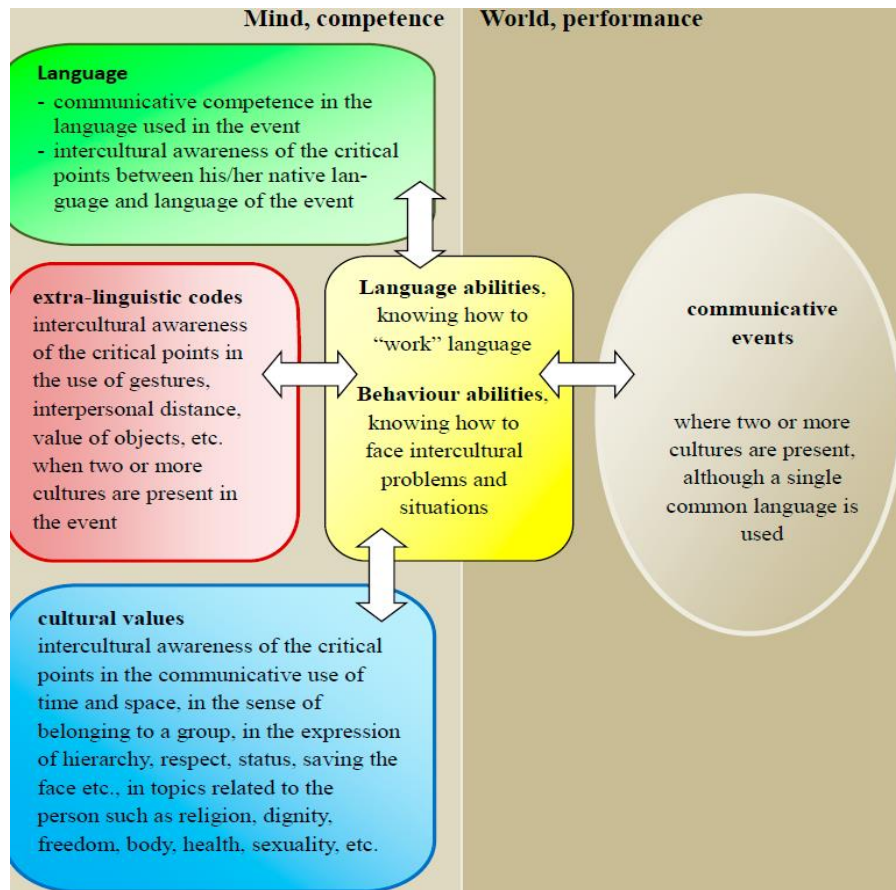
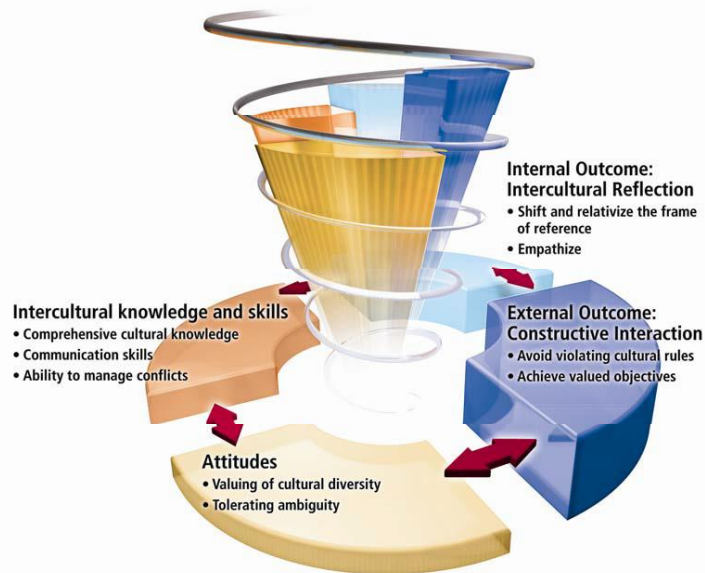


Figure 1. Intercultural Communicative Competence (Balboni & Caon, 2014)

#### 4.3.2 The Process-oriented model

The second discussed concept is that of Deardorf, presenting ‘the acquisition of intercultural competence as a continuous, dynamic process and one that involves diverse dimensions while developing and enriching itself’ (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008). As stated in Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008: ‘leading US intercultural experts have reached consensus upon this definition’. Figure 2 uses the diagram from the cited publication. Intercultural Competence is presented in the form of a spiral where intercultural competence moves through different dimensions upwards, while developing and enriching.

**The Intercultural Competence Learning Spiral**



**Figure 2. The Spiral Model of Intercultural Competence of Deardorff, presented in from the publication ‘Intercultural Competence – The key competence in the 21st century?’**

Now we can analyse the model against the above described requirements of the ‘Theory of Models’:

- Economy - The model has economic structure of four components.
- Simple structure - There are only four homogeneous boxes, named: ‘Attitudes’, ‘Intercultural knowledge and skills’, ‘Internal outcome – intercultural reflection’, and ‘External outcome – constructive interaction’. These components are further explained by a drop-down menu with a list of sub-components and state the declarative rules in the concept. They are interconnected to produce the operational rules in such a way as to form a spiral (stages of the process), meaning that the acquisition of intercultural competence requires lifelong learning and is part of ongoing personal development. According to this model, the more sub-components are acquired or developed, the greater the likelihood of a higher level of intercultural competence as a result (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008). Especially interesting point in this concept is the focus on the results from the process of intercultural communication. They are expressed on two levels: as an ‘Internal outcome’ for the individual who through intercultural reflection can achieve positive ‘External outcome’, resulting in constructive dialogue, problem solving and achieving the objectives of the communication event. These outcomes will

additional motivate the person to further develop the components ‘Attitudes’ and ‘Intercultural knowledge and skills’.

- Reliability - To prove its reliability, the author has tested the model and the results are published (Deardorff, 2006).

## 5 Solution Approach

The suggested Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence applies the dialectical approach to the analysis of Intercultural Communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2010) with its three major paradigms:

### a. focus on the process

The focus on process is incorporated in the diagram by using a flowchart diagram with boxes of different shapes, connected with arrows to indicate the procedures. The arrows lead forward and backward to indicate continuity in the communication process. Hence they function as operational rules, meaning:

*‘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’.*

The arrows connect the internal and external outcomes from the Module ‘World-Performance’ with the module ‘Mind-construct’ to indicate how through reflection and evaluation, the outcomes can contribute to the ‘mental constructs’. The evaluation of the external outcome is the tangible result of this stage of the communication process, and in case of effective intercultural discourse should be sufficiently acceptable for the participants, indicated by an arrow leading outside of the process. This visualization deploys from Deardorff’s Process-oriented model.

### b. Relational aspect

The relational approach assumes that for an effective intercultural communication cross-cultural knowledge is of high importance. Therefore, the proposed model uses the box “cross-cultural values” instead of the box “cultural values” in Balboni’s model.

### c. Simultaneous discussion of controversial ideas

This paradigm accepts that ‘reality can be at once external and internal, that human behavior is predictable and creative and changeable’ (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). In the model it is incorporated by the dichotomy between the boxes ‘Mind-Construct’ and ‘World-Performance’, which is visualised by the dotted lines between them. These modules allow to analyse Intercultural Competence both as a

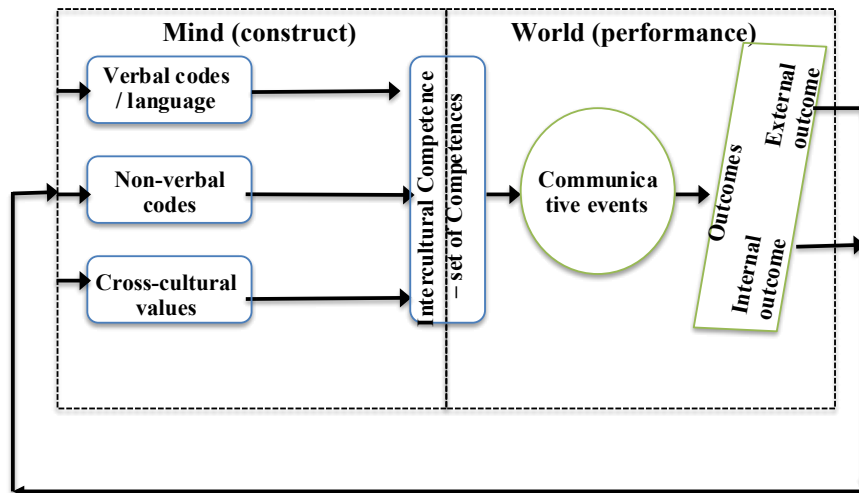


construct and as a performance without contradicting the process approach. Hence the box 'Intercultural competence as a set of competences' can be defined as the competence that is needed to transfer professional, strategic, social and personal competence areas into the specific communication event, to follow Bolten's 'Acting competence model', for example (Praxmarer, 2010).

Also the paradigm for 'simultaneous discussion of controversial ideas' provides for considering the communication in a seemingly homogenous group, consisting of co-nationals and using a common language, to be viewed as intercultural communication between different cultural groups: men and women, ethnic minorities and mainstream, people from different social layers or professions. These communities possess their own cultural values, which notion is presented by the box 'cross-cultural values'. The latter implies the idea of 'the invisible cultural backpack' (Buzera, 2012) as a database of knowledge on cultural values, which can be 'processesed' by the intercultural competence depending on the cultural characteristics of the communication event. In practice, this model becomes applicable to the analysis of intercultural competence and communication regardless of the language and belonging to a specific cultural group.

Now the paper analyzes the model against the principles of the 'Theory of Models', as outlined in (Balboni, Caon 2010):

- Economy - There are seven boxes in total. Four of them are homomorphic (have similar rectangular shapes to represent databases in the flowchart modelling), positioned in the Module 'Mind – Construct'. The fifth box is a heteromorphic element (a circle to represent an iterative process) and part of the module 'World – Performance'. The other heteromorphic element is the box 'Outcome', visualised via a parallelogram, used to display data in accordance with the flowchart modelling.



**Figure 3. Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence**

- Simple – The model uses rectangular boxes that represent databases with theoretical knowledge, they are the “grammar” and homogeneous in nature. It also incorporates a circle ‘Communication events’ to indicate an on-going communication process as well as a parallelogram to present ‘Outcomes’ of the process. These components are the declarative rules, the pillars of the model. The operational rules are described via arrows to show the direction of the process. For example, just like in Deardorff’s model, the ‘Internal outcome’ through intercultural reflection leads to the accumulation in the database, which is indicated by the arrow leading to the beginning of the model.
- In-depth structure - Each of these components can be further explained with a drop-down menu, as already explained in the Balboni’s model.

## 6 Future Work

The suggested model will be applied to analyse the dialectic in intercultural communication and assess intercultural competence in Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border teams under the CBC program between Romania – Bulgaria 2007-2014.

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