

Multimodal Appraisal Framework of Intercultural Communication Competence

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Keywords: Intercultural Communication Competence, Multimodal Appraisal.

Abstract. The modern wave of globalization has created a considerable demand for increased intercultural communication competence (ICC) of college graduates. Despite the wide attention to the concepts and assessment of ICC, there exists no uniform ICC appraisal system although teachers and scholars have made some attempts. This paper aims to propose a theoretical framework of multimodal appraisal of ICC based on review of ICC composition, communicative language testing theory and multimodal teaching theory.

Introduction

Though there exists no universally accepted definition of intercultural communication competence, majority of scholars agree “intercultural communicative competence refers to the capability to exchange effectively and properly with people from different cultural backgrounds”. Modern wave of economic globalization enables the exchange and cooperation between countries more frequent, accordingly talents familiar with international affairs and skilled in intercultural communication have been in great demand. The whole nation, especially the society of foreign language teaching has paid considerable attention to the cultivation of students’ intercultural communicative competence. “College English Syllabus”, as the National College English teaching guidance document, states clearly that intercultural communication competence is a fundamental part of English learning and teaching.

Testing, an important step of English learning and teaching, however is hardly done in the English tests. Recent years, reforms have been conducted to national uniform college English tests, but with only a small part of historical and habitual facts are tested and students just need to recite the historical facts before tests, which actually is of little value to cultivation of practical international communication competence.

Meanwhile, the test mode of ICC in China is relatively unitary. From 1982 to 2015, 32 ICC tests have been in use in western countries by at least the following three delivery ways: online survey, test paper and online test. 3 of the 32 tests are done by both paper tests and online survey. The number distribution of rest tests delivery means are 16, 7 and 3 respectively (Griffith R L, Wolfeld L, Armon B K, et al., 2016).

Thereupon, this paper reviews the composition of ICC and multimodal teaching theory, and then proposes the framework of multimodal appraisal of ICC. The framework can provide a convenient and efficient instrument for students’ ICC assessment, and also provide guidelines for intercultural teaching and learning.

Literature Review and Theoretic Basis

Definition of Intercultural Communication Competence

The definition of ICC is still in discussion. Currently scholars home and abroad give different definitions of ICC. Byram(1997) put forward that intercultural communicative competence(CC) are “knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others’ values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one’s self. Linguistic competence plays a key role.” D. A. Griffith and Harvey(2000) believed that ICC is composed by cultural understanding, cultural interaction, communication interaction, relationship quality. Deardorff(2004) thought ICC concludes requisite attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, skills, desired internal outcomes and desired external outcomes.

Chinese scholars and researchers have also put forward various definitions of ICC. Xue-hui Liu(2003) put forward that the ICC is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional concept. It includes the dimensions of thought, behavior as well as emotion and personality in addition to the knowledge dimension. In Xuemei Cheng’s opinion(2012), ICC system includes four subsystems: system of basic communication competence, system of emotion and relationship competence, system of plot construction competence and system of communication strategy competence. Wen-zhong Hu (2013) summarized the academic argument that ICC is made of three parts: cognition, feelings (attitude) and behavior. Then he proposed a conceptual framework for assessing ICC with the principle of integration of theory and practice. Yong-chen Gao(2015) thought that intercultural communicative competence consists six elements: knowledge, consciousness, thinking, attitudes, skills, and strategies.

Though no uniform definition is reached, it can be drawn that ICC is composed of skills, awareness, knowledge and etc. In this paper, the author follows Byran’s definition of ICC, which includes attitude, skills and knowledge.

Review of Researches on ICC Appraisal Home and Abroad

The study of intercultural communication competence test appears continuously at home and abroad.

In the west, Ruben and Kealey (1979) took the technical personnel and their spouses overseas as the research object for the study of interpersonal behavior and intercultural adaptation.; Koester and Olebe (1988), maked out an evaluation questionnaire about intercultural communication behavior, which measure people’s communicative behavior from eight aspects; Kelley and Meyers (1995), develop an intercultural adaptability scale made up with 50 questions, including several evaluation elements: emotion adaptability, flexibility and openness, perceptual acuity and individual autonomy and so on; Hammer, etc. (2003), also put out 50 questions to measure people’s intercultural communication competence; Sinicrope, etc. (2007), summarized the assessment tools of intercultural communicative competence, besides, he distinguishes indirect evaluation from direct evaluation.

In China, Wang Zhenya(1990), on the social and cultural test and analysis, uses a set of the social culture test of 60 questions to exam the participants in the “common culture” and the “official culture” from two aspects of knowledge and ability; Si-ming Sang and Shou-feng Jia(1993) tested cross-cultural communication pragmatic by adopting 58 questions for English major students; Bao-quan Liu(2003) have done a contrast research on students of European background and non-european students about cross-cultural communication ability test, to explore new perspective in language

testing field from the angle of cross-cultural; Yang Yang(2013) defined the intercultural communicative competence test construct, compiled the cross-cultural communicative competence test; Communicative competence, at the same time, he compiled an test sample of intercultural communicative competence; Yong-chen Gao(2014) constructed college students' cross-cultural communication ability assessment system and test scale. Many beneficial attempts are made, but mostly are questionnaire or monotonous paper tests.

Mode and Multimodal Teaching Theory

Generally speaking, people have at least three sense: auditory sense, visual sense and sense of touch. Multimodal theory insists to make full use of human sense in language leaching. In ICC multimodal appraisal, there are four test modes: text mode, visual mode, sound mode and video mode. Different with paper and pen test, multimodal appraisal is a computer or online-based test, which the testing items are presented by at least two different modes.

Multimodal teaching theory was first put forward by New London Group in 1996. It claims that we should capture, transmit and receive information from different ways, such as Internet, pictures, sounds, etc. At the same time, it suggests to use a variety of teaching methods to achieve the coordinated operation of their various senses, so as to mobilize the students to participate in language learning actively and autonomously. What's more, it also can refer all kinds of ways that symbolic resources were mobilized to make sense in a specific text (Baldry, Thibault, 2006). In multimodal teaching framework, mode selection is an important reference to teaching efficiency. So any mode that can facilitate teaching situation, can offer auxiliary conditions for teaching, can be used as a feasible teaching mode (De-lu Zhang, 2009). Under the network environment, with the complement of a variety of resources, the learners get understanding of meaning through semiotic resource, thus to improve the enthusiasm and passion to participate in communication (Chun-guang Li, 2013).

Framework of ICC Multimodal Appraisal

Connotation of the ICC in Multimodal Appraisal

According to Byram, the connotation of ICC contains three elements: attitudes, knowledge and skills. Multimodal appraisal mainly assesses these three points.

As to "attitude", it mainly refers to the differences of the concept, values, behavior and performance of the communication objects. In order to communicate well the communicator need to holds a curious attitude and an open mind towards the opposite side's social and cultural characteristics. They should better find the other cultural characteristics of the opposite communicator actively, and then deepen the understanding of them by contact with them frequently.

The element "knowledge" in ICC includes two kinds: social cultural knowledge and knowledge of controlling the communication process. As to the social cultural knowledge, there are three categories, social knowledge (for example, customs, etiquette, background, etc.), humanities knowledge (for example, poetry, drama, prose, fiction, music, film and television, etc.) and scientific knowledge (there are two kinds in scientific knowledge: natural science and applied science. Natural science includes mathematics, physics, chemistry; applied science includes cognition, computing, engineering, health, etc). As to second kind, it demands us to appropriately use the rule

of social and cultural knowledge to control the communication process according to the actual need in the process of communication.

As to “skills” in ICC, there are two skills the communicator need to process. First, after receiving the information, the learners need to analyze it according to the social and cultural knowledge they have in mind in order to get the understanding and explanation; Second, the communicator need to find new information on the basis of the first skill, then put the them together with the information they have digested to serve for communication. The combination of these two skills will help to apply the social and cultural knowledge to the practice of communication.

Four Modals Selected in Multimodal Appraisal

Though there exist different types of modes in our life, only 4 modes are selected in the framework since the 4 are easier to be facilitated with.

Text Mode

Text modal is the mainstream in the current test, it is indispensable to any tests. Text mode has the characteristics of accuracy, simplicity. Words can express process of the individual participants' physical events, emotional speech, etc.

Picture (Visual) Mode

Picture (visual) mode has features such as vividness, concreteness and it can express the two-way transitive process. Some abstract concepts can be expressed more effectively in text modal. , maybe it is difficult to accurately express with other modal, but sometimes it can be expressed more economical and accurate combining with picture mode.

Sound Mode

As to sound mode, the characteristics of sound is irreversible. The sound cannot be read over and over again like texts, however, the development of multimedia technology has offered sufficient technical support for the retention, replication and replay of voice. In the process of intercultural communication, dialogue is essential for direct communication. The pronunciation, intonation, pause, stress, tone, etc can all reflect the inner activities of the communicators. In traditional written tests, the function of text model is limited. However, it can be text with sound model in multimodal tests theory.

Video Mode

The biggest advantage of video mode is its realistic simulation of scenarios. As a kind of conversational strategies, conversational implication is a part of communicative competence widely used in English. Focusing on pragmatics, communicative language testing is of high requirements on the context. As we know, the test content and the teaching content of ICC have a certain correlation. However, ICC test is different from the memory test of knowledge. Beside the high requirements on the context, the authenticity is another important feature of ICC test. The authenticity of communication emphasizes the interaction between the test taker and testing tasks. To improve the authenticity of the test can improve the validity of the test.

In traditional test, to simulate and reproduce the various communicative scenarios encountered in the real life is extremely difficult from the point of view of the reliability and validity. Thanks to the video mode in test, it can simulate the real scene without taking too much time and effort.

Mode Choice and Mode Collocation

When choosing a modal in communication we generally consider whether this modal is more appropriate than other modal in expressing the original meaning. Therefore, To have a good command of the characteristics of various modals, especially its professional characteristics is the precondition of modal selection. At the same time, to choose appropriate modal demand us to have a good knowledge of the potential communicative functions. What's more, we must consider its applicability to the specific context as well.

On choosing testing mode of ICC, knowledge is relatively easily than the other two elements. Based on text mode, we can choose other different test modals as auxiliary according to the different classification of knowledge. When testing the knowledge element, picture mode is suitable for portraits and geographical knowledge. Although text can reflect its basic meaning, it cannot express the original meaning of portrait and map. Text mode is the most direct and convenient when testing humanities knowledge because it is mainly learned by memorizing, and not too much subjective analysis and communication skills are needed there. Sound modal plays an irreplaceable role in testing music for auditory cannot be expressed by words accurately. As to some social knowledge, such as etiquette and ceremony, it is better to use video modal to test. Etiquette and ceremony are of great interoperability, which has high demands on context, for example, coherent action, exact expression, appropriate dress, and accurate speech.

When testing the skills element, it is relatively obvious for us to choose a suitable test mode. Skills mainly examine the actual operation ability in the face of the actual situation of communication.

Attitude is an abstract concept in ICC. The traditional text modal can be combined with video mode, performing modal in testing. Combining the video modal and text mode as collocation, the test taker can catch a lot of information from the characters in video form wearing, expression, action, speech, and the scene background which can imply the information of cultural difference and difference in values. Thus the test taker can write the answer quickly and directly with text mode. In examining western table manners, for example, why the male master glanced at everyone before the dinner? If we test it in text modal, it is difficult for the examinee to find the answer quickly. If we combine the test mode and video mode, the examinee is easy to get the answer in the atmosphere and scenarios; they have to prayer before having dinner.

Different modes have their special characteristics and unique professional features. Only when they are complementary to strengthen each other as auxiliary can they play a role well of multimodal communication. In order to achieve the test target, we have to select the right the modal system according to the cultural context and situational context to achieve the best test effect.

Conclusion

In this paper, the author starts from the definition of ICC, and then introduces the exiting researches on ICC appraisal home and abroad and the theoretic background. In the third part, it presents the connotation of the ICC in multimodal appraisal and makes a analysis of the four modals in multimodal appraisal, as well as demonstrates the advantage of multimodal appraisal and how to make mode choice and mode collocation. At last, theoretical framework of ICC multimodal appraisal has been constructed.

However, work about the reliability and validity of this testing modal is not enough, the author will continue to do research in this direction.

Acknowledgement

This research was supported by the Humanities and Social Sciences Project of Hubei Provincial Department of Education, ID 13y021.

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