

A dialogic critique of Intercultural Communicative Competence applied in language learning and teaching

Catherine Matsuo
Fukuoka University
Japan
cathshini@ybb.ne.jp

Philosopher of language, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975)

- Russian (Soviet) near-contemporary of Saussure
- Leader of the Bakhtin Circle in the 1920s
- Creator of dialogic theory of language
- Creator of the first linguistics of *discourse*:
 - a “metalinguistics” of the dialogic relationships of utterances in discourse
- Opposition to Saussure’s language, *langue*, as “complete system of signs” allows him to build dialogic theory

Mikhail Bakhtin’s response to Saussure

- *langue* as “complete system of signs”
- For Bakhtin, *langue*= monolithic (monologic), hermetic
- a symptom of Western European rationalism, which permeates all spheres of ideological life
- monologic conception of truth
- This unity of truth, indeed, any semantic unity represented by a single consciousness
- What lies outside the system or single consciousness is “accidental” or “inessential” (Bakhtin, 1994)
- There is “only one principle of cognitive individualization: error” (Bakhtin, *ibid.* p. 81)
- Monologic way of perceiving cognition and truth arises only where consciousness is placed above existence

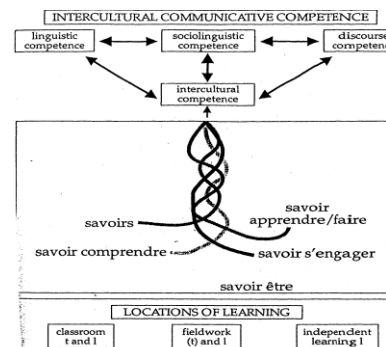
Bakhtin’s “masterstroke” (Holquist, 2000)

- Key insight: the nature of human existence and knowledge is linguistic
- The real nature of this language is speech communication in dialogue
- Bakhtin then makes dialogue a model for human existence
- This allows him to build a wide-ranging philosophy of language, of communication, of culture, of ethics

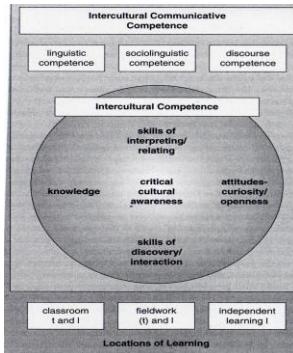
Bakhtin’s addressivity; answerability

- The principle of dialogue entails the presence of another
- The dialogic utterance is constituted on the basis of addressivity—it is already and always a response, it is constructed to receive a response
 - The utterance is always and already half someone else’s
- Ethics inheres in the kinds of patterns of self-other relations we participate in:
 - Subject-subject; subject-object

Michael Byram’s Intercultural Communicative Competence Model (1997)



Michael Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence Model (2009)



Historically contingent assumptions in ICC model

- Language: L2 *de facto* structural basis
- Culture: *de facto* national culture
- Communication: Western, individual-centered (egocentric); "rational"
 - Cognitive-instrumental rationality that has...deeply marked the self-understanding of the modern area (Habermas, 1981, p. 10) [in the West]
 - Buber's egology—the other is merely a prop for the development of the self
 - Reductive, generally negative view of "the other"
 - "we use communication strategies to counter the negative effects of alterity" (Candlin, 2013)
- a *minority* view—in many parts of the world—communication is understood as *relational*
- Ethics: Western program of rights and rationality
 - Kantian rationality; *politische Bildung*, i.e. political activist, human rights dimension
- Pedagogical approach: Western European/transatlantic CLT

Critique of ICC model from pedagogical perspective

- Individual oriented list-type model type is theoretically weak—cannot explain or predict development of ICC
- cannot determine relations between competences
- Cannot explain role, relationships of L1/L2/L3
- Limited pedagogical application: identifies competences; specifies teaching objectives
- Does not model interaction
- *De facto*: competence is located **within** the individual
- Implications for pedagogy:
 - allows the notion of competence as located within individual to persist or be paramount;
 - may influence teacher's mind-set and classroom actions—how they conceptualize communicative acts

Spitzberg and Changnon survey of IC/ICC models

- IC still viewed as an individual and trait concept
- indicates a wider historical and entrenched bias in favour of the individual
 - despite repeated calls for expanded and more *relational* perspectives towards competence (Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984; 1989)
 - Even models that assume a partner still define skills and knowledge as being possessed by individuals
- Interactants always "too"conscious, rational, intentional
- Virtually no attention paid to physiological, emotional aspects of interactants

The consolidation of monologism due to European rationalism

- The monologic idea (in Europe) for the last several hundred years
 - Is the principle for visualizing and representing the world
 - Is the principle behind the choice and unification of material
 - The principle behind the single-toned quality of all the elements of the work

Abstract theoreticism vs the event of moral being and practical reasoning

- Theory: Thought-about-the world
 - persons and cultures become voiceless objects
 - Event of moral being: thinking-in-the-world
 - we are face-to-face with another speaking subject
 - Abstractions are self-generating; they write (*and read*) themselves:
 - Language learning; use: "a site of struggle for the control of social power and cultural memory" (Kramsch, 2002, cited Kramsch 2012)
- a site
- site → struggle →
- struggle → control
- control → power

Structural Linguistic basis of linguistic competence in the ICC model

- Saussure's structuralist "revolution": system of signs
- Chomsky's generative "revolution": the perfect knowledge of language structure within the (idealized) native-speaker
- Hymes asserts the *inter-dependency* of different types of knowledge (linguistic, social, cultural) BUT leaves Chomskyan competence intact in CC model
 - takes "an intra-organism ticket to an inter-organism destination" (Halliday, 1978)
- De facto, subsequent Anglosphere models based on Hymes are based on a structural view of language

Evolution of communicative competence models

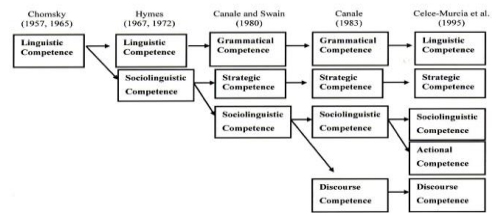


Figure 3.1 Chronological evolution of "communicative competence"

Language-as-system in pedagogy

- Language-as-system is closed so cannot be "communicative"; cannot break out of itself
 - Ergo, it cannot be taught "communicatively"
- Its basic unit is the sentence
 - a unit of grammar; not of speech communication
 - It deals with the semantically fixed
 - The words in a sentence, taught as a sentence, are signals, not signs
 - It is not constituted as a response to anything or anyone, and so not constituted in order to receive a response
 - Questions from the teacher about them likely elicit only "right" or "wrong" answers
 - In language-as-system, the deep-seated (infinite) contextual meaning disappears (Bakhtin, 1986)
 - Reduced potential for the unforeseen: Language has no power to surprise

Mikhail Bakhtin: Abstract theoreticism vs the event of moral being and practical reasoning

- "A theory needs to be brought into communion not with theoretical constructions and conceived life but with the actually occurring event of moral being—with practical reason."
 - » (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 12)

a linguistic perspective offers only passive understanding

- A linguistic perspective delivers only "a passive understanding of discourse, that is an understanding of an utterance's *neutral signification* not its *actual meaning*"
- A passive understanding of linguistic meaning is no understanding at all...
 - Bakhtin (1981, p. 281)

Passive understanding as outcome of a linguistics-based English foreign language education

- A passive understanding...constitutes nothing new to the word under consideration, only mirroring it, seeking, at its most ambitious, merely the full reproduction of that which is already given in the word
- —even such an understanding never goes beyond the boundaries of the word's context and in no way enriches the word.
- Therefore, insofar as the speaker operates with such a passive understanding, nothing new can be introduced into his discourse (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 281)

- An independent, responsible and active discourse is the fundamental indicator of an ethical, legal, and political human being (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 349-50)

Pedagogy of word, discourse

- Category and concept of dialogue is a superior basis for a language pedagogy
- Self-other relations inherent in dialogue: ethics integrated into the pedagogy
 - Intercultural speaker is more useful than the idealized native-speaker: speaker parity; negotiation of meanings; subject-subject
- Syllabus follows the nature of words:
 - Words participate in more than one value system; they are dialogized, disputed and re-accented as they encounter one another
- The aim is to reach understanding
- And to understand the process of reaching that understanding;

Words as signals; words as signs

- Words as signals
 - technical means for indicating this or that object
 - (Voloshinov, 1973, p. 68)
 - can be learned and memorized
- Words as signs
 - Once I start to conceive of the word-signal stone in terms of an *image of natural inertia*, it becomes a sign
 - Signs have meaning outside themselves
 - Ideological impletion makes them available for acquisition
 - Teacher has to put signs in play
 - To promote acquisition
 - To grow intellectual and emotional capacities

Bakhtin's methodology for the human sciences adapted to foreign language pedagogy

1. Perception of L2 words
 2. →→ recognition of them as familiar/unfamiliar
 3. Understanding the significance of the words in various contexts
 4. Active dialogic understanding—agreeing with them or disagreeing—the evaluative aspect of understanding
 - (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 159)
- A cycle: words are applied to new material, new conditions, enter into interanimating relationships with new contexts
 - (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345-346)
- (The teacher's expertise: Teacher knows that and how words are /may be oriented to future words)

The goal of dialogic pedagogy: to bring students to an understanding of the primacy and nature of the dialogic utterance

- When my word and an other's word meet in the dialogic utterance
 - New meanings emerge from the sharpened dialogic relationship between concepts and values
- The sharpened dialogic relationship between words and concepts
 - Creates advances in knowledge
 - deepens understanding
 - develops the intellect

AND...

- Because dialogue is always embodied
- Because the dialogic utterance
 - “has the quality of turning to someone” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.99)—
- The deeper appreciation of the **values** in words allows us to develop **empathy**,
- because we start to understand how we and others come to feel the way we do

Monologic and dialogic utterances

- Monologic utterances—recognized in cognition
 - “Canonical” or “authoritative” speech
 - Grammar instruction: words are signals
 - Students respond accordingly;
 - i.e. by recognizing rather than responding; learning, memorizing
- Dialogic utterances—responded to in integral understanding
 - Subject-subject relations
 - Responded to, if not immediately, at some future time
 - Internally persuasive discourse—evolution of the self
 - Promote acquisition

Culture as national culture

- The idea of culture as national culture makes nations appear more homogeneous than is the case (Kramsch, 1999)
- Byram (2009) responds that national cultures do exist
 - Fox’s (2004) identification of “a grammar of English behavior...rules that define our national identity and character
- Any use or understanding of metaphors of territory and boundary is faulty (Bakhtin,

Cultures as “containers”

- Culture as single wholes—billiard ball model—separate, impenetrable units that may collide
- Clash of civilizations—
 - culture presented as the new fault line of conflict;
 - the ideological battleground of the modern world system;
 - (Nederveen Pieterse, 2009; Wallerstein, 1991)
 - Culture as asset
 - Culture as last line of defence
- Cross-cultural differences as “contradictions”

In a dialogic perspective...

cultures (and individuals) cannot be thought of as spatial wholes:

“A cultural domain has no inner territory. It is located entirely upon boundaries...”

Every cultural act lives essentially on the boundaries and it receives its seriousness and significance from this fact.

Separated by abstraction from these boundaries, it loses the ground of its being and becomes vacuous, arrogant. It degenerates and dies.”

(Bakhtin, 1990, p. 274)

Borderzones: Cultures as containers AND Social and psychological entities as processual

- Thought-about-the world
 - persons and cultures become voiceless objects
- Thinking-in-the-world
 - we are face-to-face with another speaking subject
- Abstraction leads to monologic discourse...
 - recognized in cognition rather than responded to in understanding
- Abstraction leads to distance
 - and stereotypes

Borderzones: Cultures as containers AND Social and psychological entities as processual

- Thought-about-the-world **AND** thinking in the world
- Thought-about-the world
- Existence in ready-made form
 - culture as containers...
 - Nations and people do “fill” physical space
- **BUT a dialogic mind-set finds answers only to create new questions**
- **Thinking in the world:**
- people and cultures as processual psychological entities
 - The living subject with unique and specific points of view on the world
 - in moment-to-moment open-ended living sensation

Borderzones: Cultures as containers AND Social and psychological entities as processual

- Thinking-in-the-world
 - We are face to face with another speaking subject
- Collapse the distance that allows existence and cultures to be summed-up in ready-made form:
- Revisit a monologic-discourse (thought-about-the world) with a dialogic one—remember we said...?
- Dialogic discourse creates eventness in the classroom
- Use dialogic utterances between Intercultural Speakers to create intercultural environments and situations in the classroom
- Draw attention to linguaculture: How words are endowed with conceptual meaning, cultural and social values, history and flavour
 - E.g. meeting; 會議
 - Words as touchstones

- “Each word, as we know it, is a little arena for the clash and criss-crossing of differently oriented social accents. A word in the mouth of a particular individual person is a product of the living interaction of social forces”

(Voloshinov/Bakhtin, 1973, p. 41)

Pedagogy based on word, speech genres, discourse

- for integrative understanding that contributes to the unbroken ideological chain of the world symposium of/in English
- for understanding that is capable of understanding processes of understanding
- for understanding how values inhere in genres
- for understanding that has the capacity for empathy
- To understand that
 - “A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another...a word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee” (1994, p. 81)

“For each word of the utterance that we are in the process of understanding, we, as it were, lay down a set of our own answering words.

The greater their number and weight the deeper and more substantial our understanding will be”

(Voloshinov/Bakhtin, 1973, p. 102)