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# FRAMEWORK FOR MULTILINGUAL AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE

## *Bringing forward a pedagogical perspective and assessment for learning*

**Lotta Kokkonen & Teija Natri**

The fields of intercultural and multilingual communication are in flux, and there is a need to critically view and renew our thinking on the intercultural and multilingual communication competence being taught in higher education (HE). Despite the increasing interest in more critical approaches to intercultural communication and intercultural competence, there remains a lack of clear learning outcomes that would help learners and teachers conceptualise and verbalise what are the competencies they are expected to teach and learn. For HE pedagogical purposes, both learners and teachers would need explicit and clear learning outcomes for students to better reflect on and verbalise what they have learned and how they can operate in diverse contexts and situations after graduating from an institution that promotes internationalisation as a part of its curriculum.

In this chapter, we draw from different models, theories, and frameworks of intercultural and multilingual communication competence to create a pedagogical tool and a framework to help teachers and students better reflect, analyse, and verbalise the multilingual and intercultural communication competence needed in an ever-globalising world. We present a definition of multilingual and intercultural communication competence (MICC) and a framework where competence is divided into the elements of motivation and attitudes, skills, and knowledge. The framework also contains learning outcomes that can be applied when assessing MICC. The framework of MICC is not a measuring tool nor is it to be used for summative assessment. We view assessment as assessment for learning and giving and receiving feedback on MICC, which is a situational, contextual, and life-long process. Through this more critical approach to culture and intercultural communication, we also question the static and evaluative understanding of intercultural communication competence (ICC). The framework highlights issues of language, power, and multilingual communication as a part of the competence needed when people perceive each other as representing different cultural backgrounds and/or having different linguistic repertoires.

**Keywords: Multilingual and intercultural communication competence framework, assessment for learning, feedback**

Kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän ja kielitieteiden kentillä on meneillään erilaisia murroksia ja muutoksia. Näiden paradigmamuutosten johdosta kieliä ja kulttuureja ei esimerkiksi enää tarkastella ainoastaan yksittäisinä muuttumattomina kokonaisuuksina, vaan ne nähdään muuttuvina ja neuvoteltavina. Muutosten myötä kulttuurienvälisen vuorovaikutuksen ja kielten osaamisen käsitteitä on myös syytä tarkastella uusista näkökulmista. Uuden tutkimuksen valossa esimerkiksi monikielisen vuorovaikutuksen käsite on syytä nivoa osaksi kulttuurienvälisen vuorovaikutusosaamisen käsitettä.

Kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän kentällä on esitetty vaihtoehtoisia malleja ja tapoja ymmärtää ja tarkastella vuorovaikutusosaamista, mutta konkreettiset osaamistavoitteet tai osaamisen sanoittamiseen tähtäävät esimerkit ovat vielä harvassa. Korkeakoulukontekstissa ja tilanteessa, jossa opiskelijoiden ensisijaiset tarpeet liittyvät oman monikielisen ja kulttuurienvälisen osaamisen liittämiseksi osaksi muuta akateemista asiantuntijuutta, tarvitaan konkreettisia pedagogisia työkaluja ja välineitä tämän osaamisen sanoittamiseksi ja kehittämiseksi.

Tässä luvussa esittelemme monikielisen ja kulttuurienvälisen vuorovaikutusosaamisen viitekehyksen (multilingual and intercultural communication competence, MICC), jonka tavoitteena on auttaa sekä opettajia että opiskelijoita reflektoimaan, analysoimaan ja sanoittamaan opinnoissa ja työelämässä tarvittavaa monikielistä ja kulttuurienvälistä vuorovaikutusosaamista. Sen lisäksi, että luvussa kuvataan, millaisena ilmiönä monikielinen ja kulttuurienvälinen vuorovaikutusosaaminen voidaan nähdä, siinä esitellään erilaisiin tietoihin, taitoihin, sekä asenteisiin ja motivaatioon liittyviä osaamistavoitteita, jotka kaikki voivat osaltaan vaikuttaa monikieliseen ja kulttuurienväliseen vuorovaikutusosaamiseen kulloisessakin tilanteessa ja/tai kontekstissa. Viitekehystä ei ole tarkoitettu formaalin arvioinnin välineeksi, vaan viitekehys toimii osaamisen reflektoinnin ja sanoittamisen apuvälineenä. Arviointi nähdään näin ollen nimenomaan reflektiona ja vertaispalautteena.

**Asiasanat: Monikielisen ja kulttuurienvälisen vuorovaikutusosaamisen viitekehys, osaamisen sanoittaminen ja reflektointi, palaute**

# Introduction

Higher education (HE) as well as language and communication teaching within HE is part of the accelerated globalisation and internationalisation. This process leads to a more diverse working life as well as to new requirements for professionals to be able to collaborate and work with people from various backgrounds in a world of changing values and norms. Universities and other HE institutions are realising that internationalisation requires intercultural communication competence (ICC) for successful interaction with diverse peers and a maximised collegiate experience (Griffith et al., 2016).

Increased internationalisation in HE often means a greater number of foreign students and a more culturally and linguistically diverse faculty. This change is an important element of the internationalisation process, as the presence of international students and opportunities to study abroad offer valuable potential opportunities for learning (Spencer-Oatley & Dauber, 2019). Internationalisation, however, is more than cross-border mobility. The required competencies are equally relevant even if learners never reside in another society, or even in another place within their own country. For those that will not travel the world, first "they will nonetheless encounter sojourners and need to understand their experience and communicate with them and, secondly, the very fact that they may not become sojourners means that they need the perspective that challenges what they assume is normal and natural" (Byram, 2021, p. 4).

Accompanying these shifts is an acknowledged need for institutions to respond to the needs of internationalisation and to promote ICC as part of the curriculum. Dervin (2010) has rightfully pointed out that when the concept of intercultural competence is being introduced, "one needs to develop ways of making sure that it is *developed*" (Dervin 2010, p. 156).

Researchers in sociology, anthropology, psychology, education, and communication, to name a few fields, have for decades aimed at understanding what it takes for a person to communicate effectively in diverse contexts and intercultural encounters. Different concepts, such as intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993) and *intercultural communicative competence* (Byram, 2021), are being used when studying the phenomenon. Here we use the term intercultural communication competence to highlight the idea that competence takes place and is being negotiated within interaction (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002). The intercultural situation could be defined as "one in which the cultural distance between the participants is significant enough to have an effect on the interaction/communication that is noticeable to at least one of the parties" (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, p. 3). Yet, since we understand culture as an abstract concept (e.g., Piller, 2017), to be discussed later, we add that rather than cultural differences being "objective facts", we see interculturality as something where interlocutors have intersubjective interpretations of so-called cultural differences (or similarities) among each other. Extending Spitzberg's (2015) idea that "cultures do not interact — people do" (p. 24), we also see that cultures only matter to the extent they are "manifested in and through people in interaction" (p. 24).

Earlier research, as well as many contemporary studies, have aimed at measuring and evaluating intercultural competence by using quantitative methodology (see Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017, for an overview of the development of the concept of ICC). With the development and validation of standardised measurement tools (e.g., Chen & Gabrenya, 2021), some scholars have questioned "whether it is fruitful to use the term competence in order to describe the potential and desirable outcomes of intercultural learning" (Zotzmann,

2014, p. 168) and whether there really is a need to assess intercultural competence (Borghetti, 2017). When using the term intercultural communication competence, we realise that the discussions around the concept are not only around the different elements or factors related to ICC, but also around the ontological nature of the phenomenon. For example, whether ICC is seen as a trait, a skill, or a performance outcome is very much still debated (Griffith et al., 2016).

The critique of the existing models and theories of ICC is often focused on those references where competence is viewed only from a cognitive perspective as being subjective and hence unpredictable (e.g., Zotzmann, 2014). For example, Byram and Guilherme (2010) point out the following: "The concept of competence is often used to seize the dynamics of something fluid and unpredictable implied by an intercultural relation and communication with notions of skills, abilities and capacities, and then to describe and evaluate them" (p. 5). However, they also indicate that "the word intercultural expresses the impact of the unexpected, the surprising, the potential rather than the pre-structured, the foreseen or the expectable." (p. 5).

Indeed, many scholars view competence as inherently static and as a term that aims at capturing something that could also be seen as fluid and unpredictable (see, e.g., Byram & Guilherme, 2010; Zotsmann, 2014). However, in the field of communication other perspectives on communication competence, namely the relational approach, is being discussed and applied to broaden the understanding of what communication competence is and how it can be defined (see, e.g., Spitzberg, 2013; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2009).

Some scholars have suggested that a paradigm shift is occurring in the field of intercultural communication (Ferri, 2018; Poutiainen, 2014), or at least turbulence (Dervin & Tournebise, 2013) that reflects a broader development in the humanities and social sciences (Bauman, 2012). Many critical scholars promoting this shift see culture and intercultural communication as flexible, fluid, contradictory, political, and ideological constructs (e.g., Dervin, 2010; Halualani & Nakayama, 2011; Holliday, 2010; Piller, 2017). Instead of focusing on cross-cultural comparisons, where national cultures are viewed as predetermined explanations for human interaction, critical scholars have presented approaches that focus on the complexity of micro-level situations of communication. Here macro conditions and structures of power are at play within processes of communication (Halualani & Nakayama, 2011), and diverse prefigured cultural references are negotiated and co-constructed, "performed" (Frame, 2017) in a broader process of sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005).

The changes in the field have brought the need to move away from models and definitions of ICC that rely on national culture groups and singular cultural identities toward a fluid, dynamic, contested nature of cultures, multiple cultural identities, and intercultural interactions (e.g., Dervin, 2010; Holliday, 2016; Martin & Nakayama, 2015). Many theories have also been criticised for neglecting language as part of ICC (e.g., Martin & Nakayama, 2015; Piller, 2017).

As teachers in intercultural communication and linguistics in HE, we see in our everyday work that students need motivation, knowledge, and skills to operate in diverse environments. We also know that simply asking students to interact within culturally diverse contexts and situations could lead to undesirable outcomes and, for example, enhance stereotypes of "the other" (e.g., Holmes, 2005; 2006; Holmes & O'Neill, 2005). Despite the latest development in intercultural communication education in the context of HE (see Sommier et al., 2021; 2023) and the justified critique of many existing conceptualisations of ICC, there remains a real need for students, faculty, and administrators alike to be able to describe, reflect on and enhance the competencies required in contemporary and future studies. This need extends as

well to working life, which is inevitably becoming more diverse than before. In this chapter we present our framework of multilingual and intercultural communication competence (MICC) that aims at addressing this need.

It is possible to develop and enhance MICC in HE (see Deardorff, 2017; Olbertz-Siitonen, 2021) and our framework helps learners to reflect, analyse, and verbalise the competence they need and that is expected from them within multilingual and intercultural encounters. The MICC framework is developed first and foremost to serve pedagogical needs as well as support the learners in the HE context. The MICC framework combines elements of ICC and multilingual communication competence and emphasises the interpretative and situational nature of the phenomenon. Following the more critical approaches to culture and interculturality, we question the static and evaluative understanding of ICC but simultaneously draw on knowledge of possible different elements and learning outcomes from various existing categorisations and studies conceptualising ICC.

In this chapter we discuss assessment in relation to MICC and ways to design assessment of MICC that supports life-long learning (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004), reflects the critical understanding of interculturality (e.g., Dervin, 2015; Holliday, 2015; Nakayama & Martin, 2015), and follows the situational and contextual approach on communication competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002). We first offer a brief introduction of the context of learning the framework has been developed for. This is followed by a theoretical foundation of the framework and our definition of multilingual and intercultural communication competence. As the final part of the theoretical frame, we elaborate our approach concerning the assessment of MICC. In the second part of the article, we describe how the framework was developed and what different elements and learning outcomes can be used when giving and receiving feedback on MICC. Finally, we emphasise the pedagogical viewpoints we consider important when applying the MICC framework in an HE context.

## Describing the context: Learning multilingual and intercultural communication as a part of university degrees

Our context for the development of multilingual and intercultural communication competence is higher education, more specifically the communication and language studies offered at the Centre for Multilingual Academic Communication, at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Most of the students currently in Finnish HE have received their schooling in Finland. Dervin (2010), who is familiar with the Finnish context (see Dervin & Hahl, 2015), claims that in traditional language teaching and learning, interculturality is often confused with concepts like cross-cultural, multi-cultural or trans-cultural. These, according to Dervin (2010, p. 156), "do not take the same goals" as interculturality does when it is defined from a more critical perspective. Moreover, outside Finland traditional language teaching might be designed to offer learners opportunities to challenge their views of the singular target language and its users and reflect on possible stereotypes and prejudices concerning target-language countries (e.g., Byram, 1997; 2021). This kind of perspective might aim at explaining how so-called cultures influence communication, but not how communication affects cultures (see Halualani & Nakayama, 2011; Piller, 2017). It can lead to a students' wish to learn about other, often national, cultures as a part of their goals for intercultural learning (Siljamäki & Anttila, 2022).

In their language learning and acquiring of resources, Finnish students benefit from how Finnish educational and language policy includes two national languages (Finnish and Swedish) as well as from having at least one foreign language taught at schools. These languages taught at schools equip students with language resources, even though these resources are seen as linked to distinct and separate languages. When the students who have done their schooling in Finland enter the Finnish HE, university language policies offer them the opportunity to acquire more academic resources in these three languages or more. Naturally, university students also have linguistic and semiotic resources other than those provided by the educational system. Because students do have multiple language resources, this versatility enables, at the university level, learning and practices that are multilingual (see Pirhonen, 2023). Furthermore, in courses where intercultural communication is being taught through interactive and collaborative pedagogical methods, students have the opportunity to interact in international and multilingual groups. However, many of our students' conceptualisations of cultures and languages are naturally based on their previous experiences of learning about cultures and languages. Critical interculturality as well as multilingual communication are thus new concepts and represent novel perspectives to many of them (see Kokkonen et al., 2022; Pirhonen, 2023).

## Relational and interpretative perspectives to multilingual and intercultural communication competence

Recent scholarly reviews have synthesised understandings of intercultural competence (e.g., Arasatarnam-Smith, 2017; Deardorff, 2009; Holliday, 2016; Holmes & O'Neill, 2012; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009), but the processes underpinning how individuals acquire and evaluate their ICC, and where it resides, continue to be debated. Scholars vary fundamentally in how they view the ontological and epistemological nature of the phenomenon, and for example, considerable differences exist in the approaches to the contextuality of communication competence as well as in seeing ICC as a trait, a skill, or a performance outcome (Griffith et al., 2016). What is more, the paradigm shifts in the fields of intercultural communication (e.g., Dervin & Tounboise, 2013; Ferri, 2018; Poutiainen, 2014) and linguistics (e.g., Cohen & Kassis-Henderson, 2017) have inevitably led to a more critical discussion on the aims of teaching and learning of intercultural and multilingual communication competence.

In research, a postpositivist approach to ICC continues to be dominant (e.g., Peng et al., 2020). This is understandable, since theory and measuring instruments for ICC have primarily served those wanting to test, assess, train, and screen the suitability of individuals for international assignments (see Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017 for an overview). This positivistic notion of measuring and evaluating ICC as a personal trait or ability remains strong (e.g., Chen & Gabrenya, 2021), but critical voices have also questioned the measurement of ICC (e.g., Zotzmann, 2014). Some have thus suggested other related concepts or terms to discuss the phenomenon from a different perspective, and new concepts and terminology typically surface when scholars wish to distance themselves from current scientific and possible political use of the existing concepts (e.g., Dervin, 2010).

Though many famous ICC instruments may well have a solid theoretical foundation, they can still suffer from self-assessment bias. Most individuals responding to self-reporting questionnaire items will know "how to look culturally sensitive and knowledgeable" (Kealey,

2015, p. 15) and answer in a way they consider socially desirable (see e.g., Booth-Kewley 2007). Furthermore, Kealey (2015) and Dervin (2015) have pointed out that few, if any, of the positivistic models and theories can claim predictive power. This is largely due to what Dervin (2010) calls cultural differentialism (see also Nederveen Pieterse, 2004), which is based on the idea that people are different because of the cultures they belong to, or because of their "cultural belongings". From this dispositional perspective, competence is seen as somewhat stable and as relying on personal characteristics or traits that rarely change or vary from one situation or context to another (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002). From this perspective cultural differences are also defined as traits and objective data of the other cultures and knowing them is expected to enhance one's competence, or at least the ability to predict and analyse the communication of others. However, this so-called culture-specific knowledge is often based on national stereotypes and, as Dervin (2010) points out, this approach reduces individuals "to one single identity, that of a 'culture' which is, in turn, reduced to national and geographical boundaries" (p. 157).

Since the turn toward a fluid, dynamic, contested nature of cultures, multiple cultural identities, and intercultural interactions (Dervin, 2010; 2017; Ferri, 2014; Halualani & Nakayama, 2011; Holliday, 2018; Martin & Nakayama, 2015; Nakayama & Halualani, 2012), scholars have also called for "a dynamic definition of the concept that questions universal and objective assumptions" about ICC (Dervin, 2015, p. 71). When the dispositional stance is contrasted, ICC can be considered processual (Deardorff, 2017) and "a lifelong developmental process or way of 'becoming' and 'being'" (Blair, 2017, p. 112; see also Zotzmann, 2014). This leads to the notion of ICC being situational and contextual, indicating that the consideration of competent communication can vary depending on the situation, context and/or other discussants, and on the goals of the discussion (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002, 2011). Pedagogically, this means we must agree and allow the same behaviour that is perceived as an appropriate expression of competence in one context to be subject to negative evaluation in another (Dusi et al., 2014). Thus, the process of enhancing competence "can involve gains and losses in competence over both time and cultural space" (Blair, 2017, p. 112).

Nakayama and Martin (2015) are among those scholars who embrace the process-like approach to ICC. They apply a dialectic theory of ICC that draws from Bakhtin's (1982) work on dialectic tensions within communication relationships. This theory sees intercultural relations as a dynamic, fluid, and ongoing process (Nakayama & Martin, 2015). To overcome the limitation of the traditional postpositive approach to ICC that is, according to Nakayama and Martin (2015), "based on an ahistorical, a self-centred, goal-oriented, control-centric conceptualization, assuming a social equality that actually rarely exists in human relations" (p. 106), we should aim at an inclusive ICC "that considers historical realities of centuries of cultural struggles, oppression and dominance as well as contemporary realities of globalization and transnationalism with shifting borders and shifting identities" (Nakayama & Martin, 2015, p. 106). We follow Nakayama and Martin's definition of ICC, which highlights the complexity of the process and also stresses the ethical element of ICC. Ethicality is further interlinked with the idea of contextuality, meaning that competence is connected to how individuals socially position themselves in interactions as well as to their awareness of such positioning (Martin & Nakayama, 2015).

To some extent, ethicality is also considered in those models of ICC that view competence as relational. From a relational perspective, ICC is seen as an interpretation of both appropriate and effective interaction in each situation, not forgetting the ethical aspects of communication.

Here, appropriateness means that interaction partners perceive the communication as appropriate, legitimate, and fitting to a given social context and relationship, while effectiveness refers to how interaction partners can achieve preferred or desired outcomes of social interaction (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002). Ethicality that refers to the communicator's ability and willingness to take moral responsibility and behave in a way that does not insult others or create distrust is also strongly connected to ICC (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002).

Different from the dispositional approach to ICC, the social constructivist view of ICC focuses "on the co-construction of culture as a process enacted in discourse" (Angouri, 2010, p. 209). Viewing ICC through this lens and as an interpretation means that it is not something that one can have or "be" in any given situation or context. In Koester and Lustig's (2015) words: "competent intercultural communication is not something one *does* but rather something that one is *perceived to be*. One's motivations, knowledge, and skills lead to a context-specific *impression* that desirable outcomes (effectiveness, appropriateness, and perhaps satisfaction) have been achieved" (p. 20). Following this interpretative approach to ICC we view competence as a social judgement (see Spitzberg, 2013, Spitzberg and Chagnon, 2009, Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002; 2011). This means that competence is seen as an impression, not a behaviour. It is an inference one makes, not an action one takes, and further, competence is an evaluation, not a performance (Koester & Lustig, 2015).

If ICC is assumed to be an interpretation, it leads to yet another ontological conclusion, namely, that ICC only takes place in interaction. Dervin (2015) pointed out that if ICC is viewed as the trait and responsibility of an individual, the failure or challenges within interaction can then be blamed on one participant, while in fact their competence depends on the presence of other individuals. This also means that basically there is no pre-given ICC, but it is interaction partners' interpretation in a given situation and being aware of one's own competence. Here, as suggested by Dervin (2015), "the most important aspect of interculturality is that it can only happen through interactions with another person, which has an influence on how we think, behave, perform, present ourselves, and so on" (p. 72).

Some have questioned the social constructivist approach to ICC and social reality since it seems to put individual agency at the forefront and disregard the fact that while all participants are dependent on the existence of the other, they are also being influenced by the existing privileges and responsibilities (Block, 2013; Nakayama & Martin, 2015). This means that we should also pay attention to "the larger, hidden (beneath-the-surface) and visible (what we see but take-for-granted given its naturalised appearance) aspects of power that constitute intercultural communication encounters and relations" (Halualani & Nakayama, 2010, p. 5).

Yet another critique of commonly used theories and models of ICC is that most of the conceptualisations of ICC originate in the so-called Global West (e.g., Dervin, 2015; Nakayama & Halualani, 2012; Nakayama & Martin, 2015). Despite the growing influence of critical and postcolonial scholarship, few scholars have taken up the call for research on ICC that employs a more critical and less Western view of ICC. Nakayama and Martin (2015) and Dervin (2015) are among those scholars who have offered more critical conceptualisations for understanding ICC. These authors provide holistic and comprehensive descriptions of their views on ICC as a phenomenon. Despite providing examples of what these approaches might consist of when applied to intercultural communication, clear outcomes, or the elements behind the possible interpretations of ICC, are not explicitly elaborated. However, for pedagogical purposes there is a call for clear and coherent learning outcomes and conceptualisations that help students in their learning processes.

One major element missing even in most of the critical ICC models and theories is that of language. Some scholars, however, emphasise the importance of language and of language use within ICC (e.g., Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013; Ferri, 2014; Piller, 2017). In the same tone as scholars of intercultural competence, those of linguistics and language education have studied and elaborated conceptions of language and bi/multilingualism. Voices for plural approaches in language learning exist and there is a need to understand multilingualism as a resource for learning (Auger et al., 2022).

There has been a development from the notion of language as a bounded, independent, or national system (see Cummins, 2017; Lin, 2013) taught and learned as separate entities in many national education systems to a more recent understanding of language as diverse language practices (García & Lin, 2017) or social constructions (Cummins, 2017). García and Lin (2017) recognise the importance of "named languages" and Cummins (2017) notes that social constructions produce an important material and symbolic reality like school curricula.

This movement from singular languages towards languages and languaging in the plural represents a more fluid perspective of language (Auger et al., 2022). Languaging can be defined as a "focus on the dynamics of real-time behavioural events that are co-constructed by co-acting agents rather than the more usual view that persons 'use' a determinate language system or code" (Thibault, 2011, p. 211). For Thibault (2011), the grounding of languaging is in the real-time dynamics of an interaction situation and it can be defined as a whole-body sensemaking activity which enables engaging with vocalising, bodily resources, and external aspects like environmental affordances. Furthermore, Thibault (2011) defines language as lexico-grammatical patterns that guide and constrain languaging situations. These stabilised patterns are the results of longer cultural timescales and are subjected to more normative codes and expectations at the population level (Thibault, 2011). This dual aspect of language constantly evolving but being unified at the same time by societal needs is already present in Bakhtin's (1980) notion of heteroglossia and in Dervin's and Liddicoat's (2013) definition of languages being at the same time personal and communal.

Blommaert (2010) develops the fluid perspective of languages in his definitions of resources and repertoires. He sees resources as observable ways of using languages. There is a shift from language as a system to personal truncated repertoires and resources used in communication situations. For him, the repertoire comes from biographies and wider histories of the communities of a person (Blommaert, 2010, p. 105).

The fluid perspective to languages can be seen in various studies in relation to multilingual repertoires. For some, like Thorne and Ivkovic (2015), multilingualism is an appropriate term to use on multiple linguistic repertoires and the presence of multiple languages in society. On the other hand, Blommaert (2010) defines multilingualism as a complexity of specific semiotic resources that one speaker can use in a given situation. In addition to these definitions of multilingualism, the Council of Europe has adopted the construct of plurilingualism for an individual's linguistic repertoire which includes various types of linguistic competence at different levels of proficiency. This term seems to be more in use in the francophone scientific community (Gajo, 2014).

From a language learning perspective, the term *translanguaging* is often used when researchers study how linguistic features and resources are used fluidly by individuals. As multilingualism, this term is also used for various approaches. García and Lin (2017) divide it into weak and strong versions of translanguaging. The strong version means that the

individual is using an integrated repertoire of linguistic features, not separate languages. In the weak version, language boundaries exist but need to be softened.

Considering the recent development in the fields of intercultural communication and linguistics, combined with the needs in teaching and learning ICC and multilingual communication in HE, there is a need for a definition of what we call *multilingual and intercultural communication competence* (MICC). Based on the theoretical foundation laid out previously in the chapter, we define multilingual and intercultural communication competence (MICC) as

> an interpretation of effective and appropriate communication with the use of linguistic and semiotic resources and repertoires in situations and contexts where interculturality and cultures are relevant to the interactants. MICC is situated and contextual and evolving as a continuous and dynamic process based on interaction.

We want to stress that MICC, like ICC, is processual (Deardorff, 2017) and a lifelong developmental process (see e.g. Blair, 2017). MICC entails different elements of attitudes and motivation, knowledge and skills that are intertwined and negotiated within those participating in the interaction. We view MICC as "an inference, not an ability" (Spitzberg, 2015, p. 25), and as such it is a malleable construct that may be developed through education and/or experience (Borghetti, 2017), and improved in higher education (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017; Olbertz-Siitonen, 2021). When we see MICC as something to be developed and enhanced, the question of assessment surfaces. To meet the need to help students to analyse, reflect, and give and receive feedback on MICC, including the language-related elements of communication, we need tools and a framework that supports this aim. Before introducing the framework and the different elements of MICC, we need to address the fundamental question of what we mean by assessment.

## Assessment for learning

The role of different forms of assessment and their usability in intercultural communication competence and multi/plurilingual learning have been widely discussed (e.g., Borghetti, 2017; Saville & Seed, 2021). For our approach, formative assessment and, more precisely, assessment for learning (AfL) theories seem to be more suitable than summative assessment or assessment of learning. Formative assessment is considered to be effective if it is integrated into the learning milieu (Wiliam, 2011). Wiliam (2011) presents, among other formative assessment terms, the development of AfL. Like any other approach, AfL can be studied from various perspectives, and it can also be defined differently (see DeLuca et al., 2018; Hawe & Dixon, 2017; Heritage, 2018; Wiliam, 2011; Willis, 2011). For researchers such as Brown (2019), AfL seems to be a contradictory term. Brown (2019) does not consider AfL to be assessment but rather a pedagogical curriculum approach. We do not wish to enter Brown's discussion of the term *assessment* in AfL here, but we agree with him on the pedagogical viewpoint as well as on the idea of involving learners in defining goals and in assessing their own and their peers' work.

Klenowski (2009) defines AfL as a part of students' and teachers' daily practice for seeking, reflecting upon, and responding to information coming from various sources and thus enhancing ongoing learning. One of the central foci of AfL is the student's agency and self-regulated learning because it involves students as active agents who are metacognitively,

motivationally, and behaviourally active in their own learning (Heritage, 2018). Since we see MICC as taking place within interaction and being situational and contextual, AfL is, for our purposes, a suitable assessment approach because it activates students as owners of their own learning and it can be seen as an interactive, situated process (Wiliam, 2011). One of the aims of AfL is also to develop students' learning-to-learn skills (Heritage, 2018).

Our pedagogical thinking relies on supporting students' self-regulation and one way to achieve self-regulation is to receive external support from others, for instance in the form of peer-feedback. From this perspective, learning is indeed a communicative process (Heritage, 2018). Along with peer feedback, self-assessment is crucial because it involves comparing one's execution process with some criteria and becoming aware of what has been done (Panadero et al., 2012). Further, when feedback, for instance in the form of peer assessment, is part of the overall assessment, it consolidates the learning (Taras, 2010).

Following our definition of MICC being situational and contextual, we are drawn to Willis's (2011) understanding of learning also being situated. He follows Vygotsky's sociocultural theories that stress learning being influenced by its context and that learning, action and thinking cannot be separated (Willis, 2011). We agree with Willis that the basic unit of analysis is the process of sociocultural activity, that of participating in socially constituted practices, and not individual traits or competences of participants.

Learning can also be seen as a process of belonging to a community, becoming more expert and developing an identity. Here we can also consider AfL practices as being culturally situated patterns of participation where participants negotiate their understanding and participation (see Willis, 2011). Learners will bring to the situation their multiple identities within various communities of practice, and to participate they need to understand the cognitive and social expectations of the situation. Willis (2011) sees that peer and self-assessment help learners to reflect on and assess their learning and, in that way, help them to develop expertise. We believe that through peer and self-assessment learners will also have a chance to negotiate the norms and values that are appropriate and effective in that specific situation and/or context.

As teachers we ought to ensure that students participating in the AfL processes have a shared understanding of the aims and goals of the feedback. For peer feedback to enhance learning, students need to have sufficiently trusting relationships to give constructive feedback to each other, which is said to enhance learning (DeLuca et al., 2018). The feedback should focus on the processing of the task and self-regulation since these seem to be powerful in enhancing deep processing (Wiliam, 2011). Feedback about the task is, in turn, useful for enhancing self-regulation, while feedback about the self as a person seems to be, according to Wiliam (2011), the least effective. We must also acknowledge that giving and receiving feedback is an emotional process where previous experiences of feedback influence the way we receive feedback now (Lepschy, 2008). It is said that in the present era of competence-based curricula with a focus on soft skills and professional development, feedback is considered more essential than ever, and feedback has rightly become a focus of teaching research and practice (Wisniewski et al., 2020; see also Engerer et al., 2016). For AfL purposes, there is a need for clear learning outcomes of MICC (Kokkonen & Natri, 2023), and later we will present detailed learning outcomes for MICC. The most important characteristic of these learning outcomes is that they are meant for reflective, learning-oriented assessment and can only be used for situated and contextualised peer feedback and self-assessment purposes. But first, we will illustrate how the framework and the learning outcomes of MICC were developed.

## Developing the framework to help students reflect, verbalize, and discuss feedback on MICC

Dervin and Hahl (2015) have commented on the need, for pedagogical purposes, for clear and coherent learning outcomes and goals that the students can reflect on. While searching for a suitable methodology and tools for our students to reflect on and verbalise their MICC, we found that none of the existing models of ICC and multilingual communication offered suitable learning outcomes and elements that would meet our goals. We feel that none of the models and instruments discussed in the preparation phase of the framework of MICC would be applicable without modifications. This will be addressed later in this chapter when describing the process in more detail. However, the existing literature on different elements of ICC and multilingual communication could perhaps be useful and help the students verbalise and analyse the possible different elements and conceptualisations of the interpreted competence taking place in interaction.

Literature reviews have highlighted that ICC and linguistic repertoires consist of components or elements in three domains (e.g., Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Gregersen-Hermans, 2017; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). The three common, interlinked denominators are attitudes and motivation, knowledge, and skills. Spitzberg (2013) states that "to be competent, an interactant needs to have the motivation to create a competent impression and avoid being debilitated by anxiety. Further, an interactant needs to have the knowledge relevant to the context, topics, activity procedures, norms, and the like. Having motivation and knowledge, however, may not be sufficient if the person cannot demonstrate the actual interaction and language skills required to implement their goals and understandings" (p. 131; see also Lustig & Koester, 2003; Wiseman, 2002). We see that MICC requires foundational attributes, such as individual knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which, for those involved, foster observable outcomes both internally and externally that lead to interpretations of effective and appropriate communication.

For us, the aim is not to be an "intercultural performer" who simply applies the skills, knowledge and attitudes gained in intercultural training in different contexts (see Ferri, 2014). We see MICC as a subjective interpretation of skills, knowledge, and attitudes, not an intrinsic feature possessed by someone. Further, we believe that attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to MICC can be enhanced through educational experience and that they are in use when recognising the appropriate and effective way to act in each context, situation, and relationship (Borghetti, 2017; Pakdel, 2011). Further, we believe that students acquire and enhance competence through an ongoing cycle or process of lifelong learning (see Blair, 2017; Zotzmann, 2014).

In line with the critical turn in intercultural communication, we are also aware of the limitations of theories and conceptualisations developed and tested in a limited number of contexts (see Dervin, 2015; Nakayama & Martin, 2015). Thus, as a part of MICC one needs to be aware of power relations and historical positionings of the interactants to act ethically in diverse settings. Here we lean more toward an interpretative approach of ICC that relies on ongoing negotiations within interaction (see Angouri, 2010). The macro-level privileges and historical power relationships therefore need to be acknowledged and discussed, yet we feel they should not necessarily be taken as predetermining factors automatically influencing every communication situation. Acknowledging these phenomena as well as the final conceptualisations of MICC, assessment should be based on the active participation and

engagement of those learning and involved in the assessment of MICC (see Willis, 2011). This, we hope, will encourage critical discussion on the underlying assumptions and ontological questions of MICC as well as allow the perspectives of those individuals participating in the interaction and assessment to be surfaced, whether these be Western, African, privileged, non-privileged, or any other.

The listing of different elements and learning outcomes is not a final description and conceptualisation of MICC. Rather, the lists and verbalisations are to be used as a starting point for a discussion and critical reflections among participants. By examining, critically discussing, and negotiating the suggested learning outcomes, students would have a possibility to formulate a holistic understanding of MICC. The idea is that participants themselves find those elements and learning outcomes they consider relevant in the given context and situation. The peer feedback should also be based on these discussions and agreed targets.

The creation of the MICC framework with learning outcomes and assessment took place in many phases. Our first step was an exhaustive literature review on ICC, language, and multilingual communication. As a result of the literature review, we created a definition of MICC and a list of elements that were divided into three categories: knowledge, skills, and attitudes and motivations (see Tables 1, 2, and 3). This was followed by the creation of clear and consistent learning objectives. Instead of providing a means for evaluation or assessment of learning, the purpose of listing the different elements and learning outcomes was to create a practical tool and a framework for pedagogical needs for AfL.

To create these elements and learning outcomes of MICC, we have utilised some well-known models of intercultural competence (see Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Chen & Gabrenya, 2021; Peng et al., 2020) as well as literature on critical interculturality and intercultural communication competence (e.g., Dervin, 2010; 2015; Holliday, 2016; Nakayama & Martin, 2015). Furthermore, to include the elements of multilingual communication several frameworks and models were utilised. It is not within the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive account of the models and frameworks of ICC nor of multilingual communication; instead we simply list the used frameworks, models, and theories here:

- Integrated Model of Intercultural Communication Competence (Arasaratnam, 2006; Arasaratnam, Banerjee, & Dembek, 2010)
- Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett, 1986; Hammer et al., 2003)
- Intercultural Competence Model (Byram, 1997, 2021)
- Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006)
- Intercultural Competencies Dimensions Model (Fantini, 2009, 2012)
- Anxiety/ Uncertainty Management (AUM) Model (Gudykunst, 1993, 1995)
- Integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 1998, 2015)
- Cultural perspective on language learning and teaching (Kramsch, 1993, 2009)
- MAGICC conceptual framework (Modularising Multilingual and Multicultural Academic Communication Competence, project) (Räsänen et al., 2013)
- Framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures (FREPA) by Council of Europe (2013)
- Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, (CEFR), Companion volume (Council of Europe 2020).

To help us in the wording of the possible learning outcomes, we also used several references that offer conceptualisations and descriptions of ICC and multilingual communication as well as different learning outcomes (e.g., Blommaert, 2010; Byram, 1997, 2021; Jackson, 2015; Kim, 2015; Lenz & Berthele, 2010; Martorana et al., 2021; Spitzberg, & Changnon, 2009).

As explained earlier, many of the existing models and frameworks mentioned above have limitations that prevent us from applying any of them as such to our purposes. As students were our focus, after collecting all the possible elements from the literature, the list of different elements and learning outcomes was narrowed down. The first criterion was to rule out those definitions, elements, and learning outcomes that reflect an essentialist view of culture (see Dervin, 2010; Holliday, 2010). In addition, those elements that could be labelled as personality traits (e.g., Spitzberg, & Cupach, 2002) were ruled out since it is not our task at the university to aim at changing anyone's personality but to enhance multilingual and intercultural communication competence. We also combined and simplified overlapping elements. At this point, a team of Movi colleagues, as experts on the context, participated in the selection of the elements and wording of the learning outcomes within the framework. As a final step, a group of both Finnish and international university students ($N$ = 24) worked with the framework by discussing the different elements and learning outcomes, producing suggestions for the wording of the learning outcomes. As a result of this process, our final list contains 23 elements and altogether 60 learning outcomes listed in Tables 1, 2, and 3 below.

There is a strong emphasis on the framework that even if the original selection and listing of the different elements is done by us and the team of teachers working at Movi, these different elements which are overlapping and intertwined need to be discussed, deconstructed and reconstructed (see Dervin, 2015) with those assessing the communication situation.

Table 1 Attitudinal and motivational elements of the MICC framework

| Element / Aspect | Learning outcomes |
|---|---|
| Respect and interest/openness towards diversity | • Positive outlook on and interest in diversity<br>• Willingness to withhold judgments<br>• Motivation to learn about cultures and diversities |
| Empathy | • Willingness to step into someone else's shoes<br>• Motivation to imagine as well as intellectually and emotionally participate in others' experiences<br>• Willingness to understand others' experiences and worldviews |
| Motivation and willingness to engage in interpersonal relationships / communication situations with culturally diverse people and/or using different language repertoires | • Willingness and motivation to engage in interaction with people from different backgrounds<br>• Willingness to understand different ways of initiating, developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships<br>• Motivation to build and maintain diverse social networks |
| Flexibility | • Willingness to adapt one's communication to the context, situation and other participants<br>• Willingness to question existing generalisations, stereotypes and prejudices<br>• Willingness to take complexity into account and to avoid generalisations<br>• Willingness to consider different forms of multilingualism |
| Awareness of cultural interpretations and judgments | • Acknowledging power relations such as inferiority / superiority<br>• Willingness to critically view and level out existing power hierarchies |
| Confidence in culturally and linguistically diverse settings, situations and relationships | • Positive outlook and confidence in intercultural and multilingual contexts and situations<br>• Motivation to accept and manage one's own and others' uncertainty and anxiety in diverse contexts and situations |
| Attitudes toward languages and linguistic repertoires | • Acknowledging the value of all language competence, even partial competence |

Table 2 Knowledge elements of the MICC framework

| Element / Aspect | Learning outcomes |
|---|---|
| Knowledge of communication, languages, multilingual repertoires, and different perspectives on culture(s) and language(s) | • Understanding how communication influences and shapes our understanding of cultures<br>• Understanding that there are different perspectives on languages and language learning |
| Knowledge and understanding of the complexities of culture, interculturality, language and multilingual communication | • Understanding that cultures are abstract, dynamic concepts that are negotiated in interaction<br>• Knowledge about constructing and negotiating cultural and linguistic identities |
| Knowledge and understanding of aspects of power in intercultural and multilingual communication | • Understanding the connections between language use, language competence and power on personal as well as societal levels (social relationships, global and political contexts)<br>• Knowledge on priorities, privileges, power, and pride linked to cultural and linguistic identity negotiations |
| Knowledge of one's values, norms, behaviour, and identity/identities | • Awareness of one's own values, attitudes, norms, behaviour, and identity/identities |
| Knowledge of processes of othering, categorisation and stereotypes and how they are manifested in communication | • Understanding the meaning of categorisations, stereotypes and prejudices<br>• Knowledge of othering, categorisations, stereotypes and how they are used, manifested, enhanced and challenged in communication<br>• Understanding of how discrimination is linked to experiences of acceptance, belonging and self-esteem |
| Knowledge of what evokes strong feelings, such as uncertainty and ambiguity, and how to manage them | • Understanding that novel situations and contexts can evoke (strong) emotional reactions<br>• Knowledge of how to manage strong emotions and feelings in novel situations and contexts |
| Knowledge of elements and principles of communication in diverse settings and contexts | • Understanding that one's own way of communicating (verbally and non-verbally) can be interpreted differently in different contexts, situations, and relationships<br>• Understanding that effectiveness and appropriateness in communication are situational and contextual |
| Knowledge of language diversity and multilingualism | • Knowledge of a variety of strategies to manage the coexistence of several languages in understanding a situation and how to employ one's own multilingual profile to strengthen, enrich and diversify access to information, processing, retaining and classifying new information.<br>• Knowledge of fluidity and dynamism of languages and ways of language use |
| Knowledge of languages and language learning | • Knowledge of one's own language competence and how to enhance language and multilingual competencies<br>• Knowledge of assessing and evaluating language competencies |

Table 3 Elements of skills within the MICC framework

| Element / aspect | Learning outcomes |
|---|---|
| Flexibility and adaptability | • Ability to adapt one's verbal and nonverbal communication according to the situation, context and participants<br>• Ability to take into consideration multiple perspectives<br>• Ability to process and react to new and novel information<br>• Ability to adapt language use to new situations and to formulate thoughts in different ways.<br>• Ability to shift between languages in order to have situational flexibility and adaptability to contribute to understanding and the participation of members with diverse multilingual and multicultural profiles. |
| Emotion regulation | • Tolerance of ambiguity: ability to accept ambiguity and lack of clarity and deal with it constructively<br>• Ability to regulate and manage one's emotions and feelings in diverse situations and contexts<br>• Ability to support others in situations, contexts and/or relationships with high uncertainty |
| Interpersonal communication skills (in order to create and maintain social networks / interpersonal relationships) | • Ability to initiate, maintain and enhance interpersonal relationships in diverse contexts and with individuals from various backgrounds<br>• Ability to listen and express listening appropriately and effectively in diverse contexts and situations<br>• Abilities to argue and negotiate in diverse settings<br>• Abilities to give and receive social support appropriately and effectively in diverse settings |
| Skills to reflect on and analyse one's own and others' communication | • Ability to understand one's own previously lived reality, values, norms and behaviour, and how these are manifested in communication within diverse contexts, situations, and relationships<br>• Ability to reflect on different elements of communication<br>• Ability to analyse, identify and compare linguistic elements in different languages and in multilingual interaction |
| Critical thinking skills | • Ability to suspend judgment<br>• Ability to critically view things from various perspectives<br>• Ability to critically reflect one's interpretations in communication |
| Language skills | • Ability to analyse linguistic data and understand how discourse contributes to the construction of information, opinions, ideas, ideologies and consciousness.<br>• Ability to communicate appropriately and effectively in diverse contexts and situations<br>• Ability to use reformulations, simplifications, repetitions, vulgarisation and exemplification, and translations in order to make oneself understood in the language of instruction or another common language |
| Multilingual skills | • Ability to use/exploit one's plurilingual repertoire, and adapt language use in plurilingual situations, e.g., breaking down the complicated information/ paraphrasing and/or restructuring to cover gaps in vocabulary or structure (flexibility)<br>• Ability to use codeswitching and code-mixing as communicatively and contextually functional devices<br>• Ability to manage the coexistence of several languages in interaction and to switch smoothly from one language to another<br>• Ability to exploit interaction for language learning and enlarging one's own multilingual and multicultural profile |

## Pedagogical guidelines for applying the framework

In the final part of this chapter, we offer pedagogical guidelines on applying the framework. Due to the strong tradition of viewing intercultural competence as a positivistic phenomenon, we hope that the framework will be primarily seen and used as a tool for peer feedback and self-reflection and not as a measuring instrument aimed at the evaluation and assessment of learning. Returning to an established concept, like intercultural competence, which has previously been employed in essentialist scholarship, has its challenges. By reframing so-called traditional concepts to support non-essentialist claims, we still might be flirting with the positivistic thought of measuring of success. Holliday (2023) calls this "a tricky business" and points out that there is a risk of critical claims ending "with positivist methodologies, but also with the positivist desire to measure, track change and quantify apparent success to satisfy neoliberal agendas" (p. 152). For this reason, we will highlight the underlying assumptions of the framework and offer some practical advice that is derived from students' experiences and our previous research on the topic (see Kokkonen & Natri, 2023).

As stated earlier, the aim of the MICC framework is not to depict the students as "intercultural performers" (Ferri, 2014). MICC is "an inference, not an ability" (e.g., Spitzberg, 2015), and as such it is a malleable construct that may be developed through education and/or experience (Borghetti, 2017) as well as improved in higher education (Dervin, 2010; Gregersen-Hermans, 2017). Even if MICC is seen as an interpretation of appropriate and effective communication in a given situation and context, the different elements of attitudes, knowledge and skills related to MICC can be enhanced through educational experience and they are in use when recognising the most appropriate and effective way to act in a given context, situation and relationship (Borghetti, 2017; Pakdel, 2011).

The framework of MICC can be applied and used as a tool for giving and receiving feedback as well as for reflecting on one's communication in a certain situation and context. Assessment is conducted through peer feedback and self-reflections. Feedback is based on the selected and discussed elements of MICC, and the situational and contextual nature of the phenomenon needs to be taken into consideration. The only ones able to assess what is being interpreted as effective and appropriate in a given situation and context are the ones participating in that interaction (Gibbs & Simpson, 2005; see also Olbertz-Siitonen, 2021). The framework and AfL need to be discussed with those participating in the feedback processes in order for them to

- get to know the multilingual and intercultural communication competence as a phenomenon and understand its complex nature;
- deconstruct as well as reconstruct the different elements and learning outcomes in order to find shared understanding of the aims and targets of the feedback and reflection;
- understand the aims and goals of AfL and its limitations (what it is not);
- be able to give and receive constructive feedback on their communication.

Our previous study on applying MICC (see Kokkonen & Natri, 2023) showed that the understanding of the contextual and situational nature of MICC was enhanced through a process that participants sometimes considered lengthy and, at times, challenging. In addition to the challenge of time and resources, students found difficulties in observing and analysing interaction, such as the abilities of others to explain one's plurilingual repertoires. On the

same note, and even if the peer feedback was not always comprehensive, many students found it rewarding that they were able to verbalise and discuss different elements and expected outcomes of intercultural and multilingual learning. It is important that the students define for themselves the different elements of MICC they consider relevant in the given context. The freedom in choosing the elements also provides them with the possibility of autonomy to negotiate interculturality, cultural identities, and appropriate multilingual practices (see Olbertz-Siitonen, 2021).

When an assessment approach is chosen carefully and the purpose of the assessment is shared, it provides information that can guide educational practices and enrich learning processes (Fantini, 2009). What students seem to find rewarding and enhancing in their learning is the combination of peer and self-feedback (Kokkonen & Natri, 2023). However, the whole process of peer feedback can be challenging, especially for those students who are not accustomed to it in their previous studies. Time and resources need to be devoted to creating and maintaining trust between the students, thereby enabling constructive feedback that enhances learning (see also Kokkonen et al., 2022).

Usually, the students participating in the assessment process are working with their groups for five to eight weeks on average. Many students seem to feel they do not have enough time with their groups to complete the assessment appropriately. This is especially a challenge in courses that are offered as basic-level courses on intercultural and/or multilingual communication. Courses on multilingual and intercultural communication typically focus on issues of critical approaches to interculturality and multilingual communication, and these alone are novel perspectives to many of our students. Students might thus have a lot to internalise in a short period of time. Moreover, peer feedback and AfL can be novel concepts for some of the students. Yet, to many of those students who were new to these issues, the process of AfL seemed to be empowering and encouraging, and enhanced their understanding that developing MICC is a life-long process (see Kokkonen & Natri, 2023).

As a solution for the HE context, we recommend that the assessment and development of MICC should be considered a part of holistic curriculum development and not just as an issue for one single course (see Gregersen-Hermans, 2017). A shift from assessment of learning to AfL requires organisational commitment to a culture of improvement rather than to a culture of performance (Watling & Ginsburg, 2019).

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