**Interculture Sensitivity from the Perspective of Intercultural Communication**

Chen Ning, Si Meng  
*Jining Medical University, Jining272067, Shandong, China*

**Abstract**

Intercultural communication competence is very important for international communication, and interculture sensitivity is one of the essential elements for communication in the interculture context. Only a deep understanding of the culture and customs of other countries can make the business interaction and cultural exchange go on smoothly. Although the history of intercultural sensitivity research is relatively short, but the concept of intercultural sensitivity varies. Chen and Starosta recognized the difficulties in the evaluation of interculture cultivation and interculture communication caused by people’s long-term confusion of concepts, and defined interculture sensitivity as a positive motivator, making people more adapt to, understand and understand cultural differences through the implementation of appropriate and effective measures.

**Key words:** Interculture sensitivity, Intercultural Communication, Multi-Culture

**1. Related Research on Interculture sensitivity (ICS)**

In the second half of the 20th century, western scholars began to pay attention to the issue of interculture sensitivity, which has gradually attracted the attention of domestic scholars, in recent years. Western scholars' research on interculture sensitivity can be traced back to the 1950s, Bronfenbrener, Harding, and Gallway were among the first researchers to address the issue of interculture sensitivity, suggesting that “interpersonal sensitivity is the ability to see how others behave, know, and feel differently from us.” English learners should not only master the language proficiency, but also have the ability of intercultural communication. In foreign countries, intercultural communication competence is generally regarded as the ultimate goal of foreign language teaching. In China, after the reform of college English test, the proportion of culture-related test questions is increasing, which fully shows that modern college English teaching will gradually focus on the cultivation of students’ intercultural communicative competence, and the significance and necessity of developing intercultural communicative competence have been widely recognized. However, there is no systematic cultural teaching program for college English teaching, especially for students who are not English majors. In recent years, the focus of English teaching in China is still on learning language knowledge, so it is necessary to find some effective ways to improve students' intercultural communication ability.

M.J. Bennett, director of the American institute of cultural development, proposed the concept of intercultural sensitivity in 1984. He believed that it is a process of cognitive, emotional and behavioral development, requiring gradual changes in emotion, cognition, behavior and ability, and ultimately achieving the goal of improving intercultural communication ability. Then in 1986, professor Bennett created the model of interculture sensitivity Development, namely DMIS (Development Modal of Interc). According to Bennett (1993), interculture sensitivity is an ability to constantly adapt to cultural differences, which is in the process of continuous development and can observe different stages of development. In 1997, K. Ushner created the ICCS (Inventory of interculture sensitivity). In 1998, Bennett and Hammer established the Intercultural Development Inventory on the basis of DMIS model. As far as IDI is concerned, Sparrow (2000) believes that it lacks social and emotional factors in detecting interculture studies. Chen and Starosta established the value range ISS (Intercultural Sensitivity Scale) on the basis of the framework system constructed with 6 interculture sensitivity elements. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) defined ICS (Intercultural Sensitivity) as an important key point for trans-oceanic talks, travel, immigration and other interculture events, and it is also an important reference factor for people to contact and understand another new cultural background.

By comparing the above studies, ISS (Intercultural Sensitivity Scale) of Chen and Starosta contains almost all the measurement factors for analyzing and studying interculture sensitivity, and is recognized as the most suitable tool for analyzing and evaluating students' interculture sensitivity.

In terms of interculture sensitivity research, domestic scholars started later than those in Europe and the United States. At present, Chinese scholars have only published a small part of empirical research articles, without forming a clear research trend, and the analysis and evaluation of interculture sensitivity is still in a nearly blank stage.
2. The Concept of the Interculture sensitivity Development Model (DMIS)

The most influential concept about interculture sensitivity is the Development Modal of Intercultural Sensitivity. Professor Bennett comprehensively analyzed the interculture sensitivity from the perspective of Development. In this model, he separated the Development process of interculture sensitivity into six stages. "Denial", "defense", "minimization", "acceptance", "adaptation" and "integration" are the three stages of adaptation. The transformation from "ethnocentrism" to "ethnorelativism" is gradually realized in emotion, cognition and behavior. DMIS not only interprets the principle of intercultural sensitivity in detail, but also is widely used in intercultural teaching and the cultivation of intercultural communication ability. In turn, it can improve the intercultural sensitivity of trainees from the level of cognition, emotion and behavior.

Professor Bennett's DMIS model includes two categories and six stages: from central nationalism to relative nationalism, and describes the different positioning of each individual for cultural differences. Central nationalism includes the denial stage, the defense stage and the least diversity stage. In these three stages of central nationalism, individuals often tend to place their worldviews at the center of all reality. (M.J. Bennett 1986). Relative nationalism consists of three other stages: acceptance, adaptation and integration. The fact that people who are relatively nationalistic understand a culture's worldview better is just one of many ways of looking at the world.

2.1. The Deny Stage

Denial is "the purest form of central nationalism" (Bennett, 1993). At this stage, people tend to deny the existence of differences. Each individual treats the culture he experiences as the only real truth, in an undifferentiated and very simplistic form. People at this stage are basically not interested in cultural differences. But when confronted with differences, they appear to accept them gently, and may later become aggressive in order to avoid or exclude the existence of such differences, which cannot be explained in depth. There are two sub-stages, isolation and isolation.

Separate stage: refers to the unconscious physical isolation between the same kind living environments with other cultures. People at this stage have not faced cultural differences or have a completely neglected attitude towards the existence of other cultures. A rare example of all-round physical isolation is a discovery in the 1970s about a tribe in the Philippines dating back to the Stone Age called Tasaday (Nance, 1975). The tribe is completely isolated from other tribes, and live a life just like thousands of years earlier than modern society. Of course, pure physical isolation is rare in today's world.

Isolation stage: The isolation stage refers to the intention of an individual or group to avoid contact with outside culture and artificially create physical and social barriers. At this stage, the individual understands the diversity through a category of "race" formed by society, "defending the unfairness of political power and economic power that should or should not be" (Bennett, 2004). Ethnically selected tribes, strong nationalist groups, and ethnically unique neighborhoods are the best proof of their intentional isolation from other cultures.

In general, for material reasons, or for spiritual reasons, individuals at this stage lack contact and understanding of cultural differences. The problem that needs to be solved at this stage is to recognize the existence of cultural differences only by exploring the subjective culture and the incentives brought by curiosity to explore the cultural differences, so that the individual can smoothly enter the next stage - the defense stage (Bennett & Bennett, 2004)

2.2. The Defense Stage

In the defense stage, cultural differences are gradually being understood, but at this stage the culture of the tribe is beautified as the only positive culture, while other cultures are more or less destroyed. They consider these cultural differences as threatening, and protect their worldviews through negative assessments and stereotypes about other cultures to achieve the goal of fighting cultural differences. Individuals at this stage divide the world into "we" and "they" and consider their culture to be a higher culture and other cultures to be a lower culture. (Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman, 2003). Professor Bennett used three stages to demonstrate the defense stage, namely the defamation stage, the superior stage, and the inversion stage.

Defamation stage: As the first part of the defensive stage, people generally think that other cultures are inferior to their own culture, have negative stereotypes to other cultural groups, and apply derogatory terms to describe other cultures (Paige, 2003). This behavior can be seen as an “out-group” assessment, and most people will be disfigured when they are faced with differences. This stage is unstable. When the individual's psychological tension is intensified, they would feel that they should stay away, and when they are restricted from each other, they are likely to return to the negative stage.

Superior stage: The superior stage means that individuals exaggerate the positive aspects of their collective and exclude other cultures into lower-status positions, which are often regarded as an “in-group” assessment.

Inversion stage: People in the inversion stage believe that other cultures are superior and feel that they are alienating cultural groups in their own country. It is very common among corporate expatriates and foreign
exchange learners. The typical comment of an individual at this stage is: "I hope that I can give up my culture and become one of them" (Bennett, 2004). This phenomenon can be seen as a fusion of negative "inside" and positive "outside" assessments.

Problems that arise during the defense stage can be addressed by emphasizing Interculture similarities and commonalities, which can lay the foundation for the next stage – the minimization of differences.

2.3. Least Diversity Stage

At this stage, individuals believe that the worldview of their national culture is universally applicable. They on the surface recognize the existence of diversity, but still believe that human beings are basically the same. They try to kill and minimize these diversity, insisting that all human beings will be bound by the same values and principles. There are two sub-stages in the least diversity stage, which are the material universal stage and the spiritual universal stage.

The general material stage: At this stage, the cultural differences in the commonalities of physics, biology, and genre in all cultures are greatly reduced, and this natural physical process is generalized to the assumed natural phenomenon. The typical individual argument at this stage is: "Mankind is the most important of all races."

The general spirit stage: Individuals at this stage believe that all human beings are the same. People have similarities. Apart from religious, economic, political or other major common factors, they are extraordinary principles, rules, laws, etc. product.

Because these “universal absolutes” blur deep cultural differences, other cultures are either despised or romanticized. People in the process of minimizing the diversity can easily overestimate their race and ethnicity, leading to the inability to appreciate other cultures. Therefore, the problem to be solved in the least diversity is “recognition of one’s own culture (ie cultural awareness)” (Bennett, 1993) and appreciation of other cultures, from the individual stage to the nationalist stage (acceptance, adaptation) And the integration stage) is over-prepared.

2.4. The Acceptance Stage

The acceptance stage is the first of three stages of relative nationalism in which judgments of cultural differences are not ethnocentric, although their judgments may be considered negative. At this stage, individuals see their own worldview as just one of many complex worldviews that one culture is no better or worse than another. Those who hold this view of the world recognize that identifying significant cultural differences is essential to understanding human interactions and is able to discriminate between different behaviors and values across cultures, but they do not imply identification with other cultures. This stage is divided into two levels: behavioral relativism and value relativism.

Behavioral relativism: behavioral relativism, also known as the stage of respect for behavioral differences, refers to respect for interculture behavioral differences, which is effective for groups that share and understand them. Medina (2008) explains that at this stage, individuals can recognize cultural differences in language, especially in verbal and nonverbal communication. People at this stage may not be comfortable with a clear cultural difference, but they still view it with a respectful and non-judgmental attitude.

Value relativism: value relativism is also known as the stage of respecting differences in values, which refers to the world outlook constructed by different beliefs and values formed due to the influence of different cultural backgrounds (Hammer & Bennett, 2001). Therefore, in the DMIS continuous system, value relativism is a further stage than behavior relativism. The acceptance of differences in values means a deeper understanding of cultural differences.

Generally speaking, in the stage of receiving recognition, every individual begins to hold a curious attitude towards cultural differences in behavior, and then respects differences in values. The problem to be solved at this stage is to “allow (individuals) to accept the views of another culture without losing their own” (Bennett, 2004).

2.5. The Adaptation Stage

At this stage, individuals consciously shift their mental perspective to the "insider" perspective. They can consciously regulate their own behavior and conduct appropriate communication with different cultural groups. The key skill at this stage of development is to see the world “through a different lens,” and to adjust their behavior to the cultural context without giving up their own worldview and cultural recognition. There are also two sub-stages in the adaptation stage: the empathy stage and the pluralism stage.

Empathy stage: empathy stage refers to the ability to understand the transformation of other cultural frameworks and communicate effectively with people from other cultures. The empathy stage may be intuitive, but most of the time the conscious framework transfer requires education and training.
Pluralist stage: the individual at this stage internalizes a different world view and may maintain two or more frames of reference. This is the case for individuals who are bicultural or multicultural (more than two cultures). (Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 2003) the difference between the empathy stage and the pluralism stage is that the empathy stage is intentional and mild, while in the pluralism stage, the transformation of the framework is a habitual behavior and effortless.

However, when an individual has a multi-cultural structure, he may experience what professor Bennett (1993) called "internal culture shock", that is, an internal tug of war between two competing worldviews. Therefore, the main issue to be addressed at this stage is the "authenticity" of one's own core values and beliefs, so that one can enter the final stage of the DMIS.

2.6. The Fusion Multi-Cultural

In the integration stage, more than one cultural worldview is packaged into a new identity. They explain the world view fairly on the base of two or more cultures, without focusing on one culture. They regard themselves as people on the margins of culture and as agents of cultural transition. The integration stage is not necessarily better than the adaptation stage, but it is particularly evident among global travelers and long-term expats.

Situation assessment stage: in the situation assessment stage, one can use a particular cultural perspective to analyze and evaluate the given culture background of the specific situations. For example, a Chinese student in the United States can choose from her own native culture Angle of view to interact, or emotionally to transform from the Angle of the Americans and look at this same interaction.

Marginalization construction stage: individuals in the marginalization construction stage do not construct their identity based on one culture, but constantly "create themselves" so that they can integrate into different cultures. Cultural integration is a necessary and positive part of one's cultural recognition. (Hammer et al., 2003). According to prof Bennett, there is no absolute right behavior or any necessary reference group for them.

In general, from the denial stage to the least diversity stage, the more ethnocentrism is positioned, the more it is seen as a way to escape cultural differences. From the adaptation stage to the fusion stage, the more relative to the position of nationalism, the more looking for ways of cultural differences. These six stages constitute a continuum, but this is not the end of the interculture sensitivity study. Bennett (1993) said that in the future, it is necessary to establish a new continuity mechanism to expand DMIS in the development direction.

3. Research Method of Interculture sensitivity

3.1. Interculture Sensitivity Scale (ISS)

Researchers usually adopt ISS scale of Chen and Starosta, and use SPSS to analyze the interculture sensitivity of the subjects. It covers five variables: communicative participation, differential sense of identity, communicative confidence, communicative pleasure and communicative focus. Communicative participation refers to the tendency and degree of communicative participation; Different sense of identity refers to the awareness of cultural differences and degree of identification; Communicative confidence refers to the confidence in participating in communication; The sense of communicative pleasure refers to the satisfaction and happiness gained from communication. Communicative focus refers to the intention and degree of concentration of the communicator in the process of communicative participation. By using SPSS to analyze the mean value of the five variables, the overall situation of the interculture sensitivity of college students is obtained, and then Pearson correlation analysis is conducted on the five variables, so as to find out the relationship between the five variables.

3.2. Inventory of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity (ICCS)

The Interculture communication sensitivity scale was created by Kushner in 1997, and it is divided into five scales including cultural integration scale, behavioral dimension scale, intellectual interaction scale, attitude scale and empathy scale, including 32 test questions.

3.3. Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)

The questionnaire for measuring interculture development was developed by Bennett and Hammer on the basis of DMIS. Based on five development modes in six stages, it contains a total of 60 questions. After completion of the questionnaire, data graphs of individuals or groups in interculture sensitive stages are generated. But Sparrow says the test is not comprehensive enough. Sparrow says it should not only include cognitive skills, but also social and emotional factors.
References


