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Encounters With the "Other": Personal Notes[1] for a Reconceptualization of Intercultural Communication Competence

■ **Current conceptions of intercultural communication competence are extremely Eurocentric. More specifically, they affirm the U.S. American, white, middle class as the center or "ideal order"—the standard by which everyone else is judged and measured, and from which they are declared to deviate. This view of competence remains hegemonic in current research and pedagogy. The purpose of this essay is to create a space for dialogue so that scholars and practitioners can begin to reflect, challenge, and interrogate current conceptions of intercultural communication competence. To do so, I first propose that much of the current field of intercultural communication might be viewed as encounters with the "Other." Second, I identify, discuss, and illustrate the typical components of intercultural communication competence in the current research literature. Next, I turn to examine critical issues that, in my view, should be included in (re)conceptualizations of intercultural competence. I conclude by exploring potentially non-Eurocentric ways of conceptualizing competence in intercultural settings.**

The citizens of the twenty-first century must learn to see through the eyes, hearts, and minds of people from cultures other than their own. Several important trends of the late twentieth century have transformed the world into a global village: technology development, globalization of the economy, widespread population migrations, the development of multiculturalism, and the demise of the nation-state in favor of sub- and supranational identifications. In order to live meaningfully and productively in this world, individuals must develop their intercultural communication competence. (Chen & Starosta, 1996, pp. 353-354)

[Intercultural communication competence] is a construct that is based on implicit privilege…Relevant questions from postcolonial critics include, "Competence and acceptance from whom? Who decides the criteria? Who doesn't? Competent or acceptable on the basis of what social and historical context?" To assume that…[communicators] negotiate mutual rules of appropriate conduct is to deny the power of ideology, historical structures, and limitations in the field of choices. (Collier, 1998, p. 142)

In recent years, intercultural communication competence has become a popular term in both educational and corporate settings. Consistent with this trend, courses on intercultural communication have become more available on college campuses across the country. The process of teaching culture and language is intricately interwoven, as Brown (1992) reminds us: "Language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language…[and] the acquisition of a second language…is also the acquisition of a second culture" (p. 75). Similarly, Heath (1992) maintains that "all language learning is cultural learning" and this process occurs "within the political, economic, social, ideological, religious, and aesthetic web of relationships of each community whose members see themselves as belonging to a particular culture" (p. 104). Duff and Uchida (1997) argue that language teachers are essentially cultural workers. In short, language teaching—including ESL instruction and teacher training—is, in many ways, about teaching cultural competence.

Much has been written on intercultural communication competence in the academic literature in the last few decades (see, for example: Chen & Starosta, 1996; Hammer, 1989; Imahori & Lanigan, 1989; Martin, 1989; Ruben, 1989; Spitzberg, 2000; Wiseman & Koester, 1993). Although some recent attempts have been made to identify the various theoretical and methodological perspectives associated with the study of intercultural communication competence (Koester, Wiseman, & Sanders, 1993; Martin, 1989, 1993), relatively little attention has been given to the fundamental Eurocentric assumptions undergirding this substantial body of work. Because current understanding of competent intercultural interaction is centered around "a specific speech community—the Euro-American community, and largely middle-class, college-educated strata within this community" (Martin, 1993, p. 18), the potential applicability and utility of these Eurocentric concepts and theories are currently being questioned (Koester & Lustig, 1991; Martin, 1993). To caution teachers and researchers, Koester and Lustig (1991) write:

Theory and research on communication constructs has, until recently, almost completely assumed that conceptualizations and operationalizations of communication constructs done within the Anglo U.S. community *apply universally to communication within all cultural groups*. However, *communication theories developed on and applied to members of the Anglo U.S. culture cannot be assumed to be universal* [emphasis mine]. (p. 250)

Although there have been some attempts to develop concepts and theories of culture and communication from the perspective of other cultural systems (e.g., Asante, 1987; Lee, Chung, Wang, & Hertel, 1995), the Eurocentric view of intercultural communication competence remains hegemonic in both teaching and research (Martin, 1993).

In this essay, I hope to shift the conversation[2] on intercultural communication competence by offering potentially different and critical ways of (re)conceptualizing this popular area of intercultural communication. In the spirit of conversation, I share some of my own experiences based on about twenty years of teaching in the multicultural classroom.[3] To begin this dialogue, I first propose that much of the current field of intercultural communication might be viewed as encounters with the "Other." Second, I identify, discuss, and illustrate the typical components of intercultural communication competence in the current research literature. Next, I turn to examine critical issues that, in my view, should be included in (re)conceptualizations of intercultural communication competence. I conclude by exploring potentially non-Eurocentric ways of conceptualizing competence in intercultural settings.

Intercultural Communication as Encounters With the "Other"

In their classic text *Communicating with Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communication*, Gudykunst and Kim (1992) propose a framework in which intercultural communication is essentially defined as a process of interaction with strangers. They elaborate: "By using the stranger as a linking concept, we can examine a general process, communicating with strangers, which subsumes intracultural, intercultural, interracial, and interethnic communication into one general framework" (p. 21). According to Gudykunst and Kim (1992):

> [Strangers represent] both the idea of nearness in that they are physically close and the idea of remoteness in that they have different values and ways of doing things. Strangers are physically present and participating in a situation and at the same time are outside the situation because they are from a different place. (p. 19)

Through this lens, the stranger is the outsider—the "Other"—a person perceived to be incongruous with the Eurocentric "ideal order." Such "ideal order" or "mythical norm" is typically defined as "white, thin, male, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure" (Lorde, 1990, p. 282), and it establishes and "defines the tacit standards from which specific others can then be declared to deviate" (Ferguson, 1990, p. 9). This Other in intercultural communication is exoticized, essentialized, and marginalized.

One way in which the Other is exoticized is through the use of "experience-distant" concepts to label the behaviors, beliefs, and values—in fact, the lives—of members of cultural communities "deviating" from the mythical norm. Geertz (1983) distinguishes "experience-near" from "experience-dis-

tant" concepts used to describe people. An experience-near description, expressed in the language of everyday life, is one that individuals might use to describe themselves in terms of lived, personal, and familiar experiences (e.g., love). On the other hand, an experience-distant description, expressed in professional jargon, is one that individuals might use to describe others in terms of impersonal, decontextualized, and unfamiliar or "exotic" experiences (e.g., individualism versus collectivism). Although the use of experience-distant descriptions is certainly not restricted to the field of intercultural communication, such descriptions exoticize the behaviors of members of other cultures. To illustrate this process, Rosaldo (1989, p. 51) cites Horace Miner's essay entitled "Body Ritual among the Nacirema" as an example:

> The daily body ritual performed by everyone includes a mouthrite. Despite the fact that these people are so punctilious about care of the mouth, this rite involves a practice which strikes the uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures.

In this account, the Nacirema becomes exotic and "primitive"—the Other. Rosaldo later points out that the above passage is a parodic description, using experience-distant concepts, of U.S. Americans (Nacirema spelled backwards is American) brushing their teeth. Similarly, labeling a student from Japan as "an individual from a 'high-context culture'"—to borrow Hall's (1976) terms—exoticizes and de-individualizes the student.

The Other in intercultural communication is essentialized. That is, Others are presented as having some inherent, unchanging, "natural" inner quality that make them different from the mythical norm. In some of my earlier work, I treated cultural identity and heritage as an essence that can be used to explain health-related beliefs among Asian Americans (Yep, 1993) or persuasive communication patterns of Latino men and women (Yep, 1995). In these studies, Asian American and Latino cultures were presented as static, transhistorical, and apolitical cultural categories. I now recognize that identities, like cultures, are social constructions that exist within specific historical and political circumstances (e.g., Yep, 1998b; Yep, Lovaas, & Ho, in press), yet much of the current intercultural communication research still treats culture as static, unchanging, and reducible to essential qualities.

The Other in intercultural communication is marginalized. Much of the research on cross-cultural comparisons (Gudykunst, 1987) tends to compare communication patterns, attitudinal clusters, value systems, and behavioral expressions of non-U.S. cultures or co-cultures (presented as marginal) to the U.S. culture, which is treated as the implicit and invisible center (Shutter, 1998). This line of research implicitly or explicitly sets up the U.S. American culture as the standard by which all other cultural groups are to be measured.

In terms of our current knowledge of communication behaviors of Others, Moon (1996) points out:

> We know quite a bit about the communication patterns of social elites in this and other countries, but little or nothing about [the less dominant voices in those cultures]…In part, our lack of knowledge stems from the imposition of dominant cultural definitions and constructs onto the communication of "Others," with the resulting comparison of their communication to that of the dominant group(s) in the language of dominance. (p. 76)

In short, much of the current research on intercultural communication might be appropriately characterized as "encounters with the Other."

Components of Intercultural Communication Competence

What is intercultural communication competence? Although there is some disagreement about the conceptualization of this construct, there is general consensus about its fundamental characteristics (Lustig & Koester, 2000). Chen and Starosta (1996), in their attempt to provide a synthesis, define intercultural communication competence as "the ability to negotiate cultural meanings and to execute appropriately effective communication behaviors that recognize the interactants' multiple identities in a specific environment" (pp. 358-359). Central to this definition are the notions of appropriateness and effectiveness—typically viewed as "outcomes" of intercultural encounters. Needless to say, different cultural communities have different perceptions of appropriateness and effectiveness.

Appropriateness refers to the ability of the communicator to meet the basic contextual requirements of the situation without severely violating norms and rules of interaction (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Lustig & Koester, 2000). For example, if a student in my class receives a low grade on a midterm, I might write on the exam "Please see me." When the student comes by, I make sure that our conversation is private (situational appropriateness), I express concern for the student's performance (relational appropriateness), and I offer assistance (role appropriateness) without embarrassing or threatening the student's self esteem. Conversely, it would be extremely inappropriate if I violated privacy rules by announcing the student's name and grade in class.

Effectiveness refers to the accomplishment of the intended effects through communication (Chen & Starosta, 1996; Lustig & Koester, 2000). This outcome focuses on the attainment of the communicator's goals while respecting the needs of the other person. If the student in the previous example came by to discuss the exam and we developed a plan to improve performance on the next test, and in the process the student's self esteem was maintained, then I would be perceived as effective. On the other hand, if we developed a plan but in the process the student felt humiliated, then I might have accomplished my goal but not effectively.

Current research (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 1996; Imahori & Lanigan, 1989; Lustig & Koester, 2000; Spitzberg, 2000) has identified basic individual and contextual components of intercultural communication competence. These components typically include motivation, knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

Motivation refers to the impetus to communicate with members of other cultural groups. This is perhaps the most important element of intercultural competence. Are people motivated to communicate? If so, to what extent are they motivated? What are their motivations? Individual motivations to communicate vary with personal, social, historical, and political circumstances. For example, a graduate student in my department, a European American from the South, is married to a woman from South Africa. They are in a very loving and supportive relationship, and their motivation to communicate is both deeply personal and political. On the other hand, one of my advisees, another European American man, is interested in becoming an intercultural consultant so that he can "make lots of money." His motivation is clearly different.

Knowledge refers to the cognitive component of competence. It consists of knowledge of self, linguistic knowledge, and knowledge about other cultures. Knowledge of self through self-awareness and monitoring is perhaps the most important. Self-knowledge means understanding oneself and one's social position. In my intercultural classes, we examine how our social position in various speech communities (e.g., a woman in a predominantly male group, a person of color in a primarily European American neighborhood) and in various communication contexts (e.g., a student in a classroom, a customer in a department store) affects how we interact with and are perceived by others. I then introduce the notion of white privilege, which McIntosh (1998) defines as:

> …an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks. (p. 165)

McIntosh goes on to list 26 conditions of daily experience that she once took for granted as a European American woman. The discussion of white privilege is liberating for some and enraging for others. One student, a Korean American woman, grinned and stated, "Now I understand! I have physical and material—not just emotional—ways of describing it." Another student in the same class, a European American man, went on a tirade about his girlfriend's culture (she is reportedly not a U.S. American) and categorically asserted his total lack of privilege as a student on financial aid. He seemed "blind" about his unearned racial and gender privileges and was not ready for dialogue or self-reflection. Self-awareness—particularly related to issues of privilege and oppression—can be threatening and upsetting. However, I

believe, as an instructor and cultural worker, that there is a need to implant the seeds to explore these ideas so that students can potentially develop awareness and understanding of the material consequences of their privilege. For this latter student, I hope that some day, instead of blaming or pathologizing his girlfriend's culture, he develops a deeper understanding of it and also becomes more aware of—without necessarily relinquishing—the many unearned privileges he enjoys as a white, U.S. American, heterosexual male who can travel freely across borders.

Linguistic knowledge, as the term suggests, refers to the understanding of other language systems. A substantial number of my students speak more than one language, and we discuss how knowledge of a language can give us insights into a culture as well as build empathy for international students and immigrants who are learning a new language and culture.

Knowledge of other cultures appears to be self-explanatory. In my years of teaching intercultural communication, I have noticed that many students tend to be more interested in learning about the Other than in engaging in a journey of self exploration and awareness. Some ask for "intercultural cookbooks" (Moon, 1996, p. 75), or a list of prescriptions for appropriate and effective behaviors to use when interacting with members of a target cultural group. Questions such as "What should I do to persuade a Japanese businessperson to sign a contract?" or "Should I talk about the importance of the church and the family with Latino clients?" are not uncommon. I hesitate to provide such "laundry lists" of intercultural behaviors as they tend to be completely devoid of contextual considerations and often reduce cultures to simplistic stereotypes. For example, many of us have heard that Chinese people, as members of a "high context" culture (Hall, 1976), tend to be indirect and seemingly unassertive in their communication style. Is this universally true, or is this a cultural construction of the Orient? I certainly know Chinese friends and students who are very assertive, and student protestors in Tiananmen Square were clearly not indirect. In these cases, the relational and political contexts are undoubtedly critical. Instead of "intercultural cookbooks," I encourage students to become more self-aware and to experience other cultures more directly and profoundly, for example, by developing personal relationships with members of those cultures.

Attitudes refer to the affective component (e.g., likes and dislikes) of intercultural competence. They can be expressed both verbally and nonverbally. For example, when we say that a British accent is sophisticated but an Indian accent is unintelligible, we are expressing our attitudes verbally. Attitudes can also be expressed nonverbally. For instance, I was initially excited to meet a male graduate student in my intercultural course who intended to become an ESL teacher and claimed to have extensive knowledge of Asian cultures. Yet somehow his words of interest did not match his actions. I quickly noticed that whenever a member of my teaching team discussed power issues or a person of color shared a personal experience, this student engaged in "nonverbal acting out": His face turned red, he shook his head,

rolled his eyes, and grinned sarcastically. Although he did not articulate his disregard for the other students or my teaching assistants, he was clearly expressing his negative attitudes toward them. Needless to say, attitudes, whether positive or negative, can deeply affect relationships.

Skills refer to the behavioral component of intercultural competence—the appropriate and effective performance of behaviors and actions in intercultural encounters. Although one might be highly motivated, self-aware, fairly knowledgeable of other languages and cultures, and display a positive attitude, one might still be unable to behave competently. For example, a student recalled an instance in which she was behaviorally incompetent. She came from the Philippines when she was a young girl and immediately started attending school in the U.S. She spoke English and thought that she had a good understanding of U.S. American culture. Eager to participate in her classes, she would raise her hand with her middle finger pointing up. She noticed that other students would avert their gaze when she raised her hand but nobody said anything. After several months, a good friend told her that her gesture had derogatory meaning. She never raised her hand in the same way again.

In this section, I discussed some of the typical components (motivation, knowledge, attitude, and skills) and outcomes (appropriateness and effectiveness) of intercultural communication competence as identified in the current research literature. I now turn my discussion to the examination of critical issues to consider for a reconceptualization of this concept.

Critical Issues for a Reconceptualization of Intercultural Communication Competence

As I noted earlier, an extremely Eurocentric view permeates our current conceptualizations of intercultural communication competence. In this section, I discuss five critical issues to consider for reconceptualizing competence in intercultural settings. These issues are associated with (a) current definitions of culture, (b) power, (c) ideology, (d) history, and (e) the centrality of culture in competence research.

Moving Beyond Hegemonic Conceptions of Culture in Intercultural Communication

Most, if not all, of the current research on intercultural communication competence treats culture as national membership (Martin, 1993). This conceptualization of culture as nation-state reflects the views of the larger discipline of intercultural communication. In her genealogical analysis of the field of intercultural communication, Moon (1996) writes:

> Up until about 1977, "culture" is conceptualized in a variety of ways (i.e., race, social class, gender, and nation), diverse analytical methods are utilized, and there is deep interest in how intersections

between various nodes of cultural identity both play out in, and are constructed by, communication. Starting about 1978, "culture" comes to be conceived almost entirely in terms of "nation-state" and by 1980, "culture" is predominantly configured as a variable in positivist research projects…[the] contested nature of "culture" often gets lost in homogenizing views of "culture as nationality" where dominant cultural voices are often the only ones heard, where the "preferred" reading of "culture" is the only reading. (pp. 73-75)

This "disjuncture" or "rupture"—to invoke Foucault's (1972) words—in the study of intercultural communication changed irrevocably how we examine "culture" in intercultural research. The examination of dimensions of cultural variability—high-low context (Hall, 1976), individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity-femininity (Hofstede, 1984)—has become hegemonic in intercultural research (Moon, 1996; Ono, 1998). And culture has become synonymous with national membership. This approach to culture as a nation-state is highly problematic in several ways: (a) It can never represent the lives and experiences of people in everyday life; (b) cultural members are homogenized and represented by the language of the privileged; and (c) an individual agency, particularly of those who are less privileged in the group, is erased.

Noting that the concept of nation is a fairly new idea, Benedict Anderson (1991), in his groundbreaking volume *Imagined Communities*, defines the nation as "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (p. 6). Anderson further elaborates on his conceptualization:

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion…the nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations…it is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm…Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship [all emphasis in the original]. (1991, pp. 6-7)

Examining of this concept reveals several problems. First, in spite of the pretension and appearance of representation, a nation never fully or adequately reflects the individuals and the lives of diverse people living in it. This approach to culture does not apply to the lives and experiences of people in everyday life (Ono, 1998).

Another problem that culture as nation-state poses, and which is closely related to the previous problem, is that culture as nationality typically ignores intersections with other fundamental social positionings such as gender, social class, sexuality, and race. Consequently, diverse groups of people are treated as homogeneous, individual differences are treated as statistical error, and "differences within national boundaries, ethnic groups, genders, and races are obscured, and hegemonic notions of 'culture' are presented as 'shared' by all cultural members" (Moon, 1996, p. 76).

A third problem associated with conceptualizing culture as nationality is the erasure of agency, particularly of those from less privileged positions (e.g., working class persons, individuals from certain racial and ethnic groups, women of color). Agency refers to the capacity to act or perform an action. It is based on the question of whether a person can freely, voluntarily, and autonomously initiate action, or whether these actions that the individual performs are in some ways determined by the manner in which their identity is constructed and maintained by the more powerful (Bhabha, 1994; Yep, 1998b). For example, a student in my intercultural course talked about "the homeless" as "stray dogs" in his mini-ethnographic project for my class.[4] Through this process of labeling and objectifying, a "homeless" person's actions were largely attributed to the identity of an undesirable, powerless, and dispossessed member of society. In short, the person's agency was erased.

I pointed out earlier that much of the intercultural competence research is based on European American, mostly middle-class, college-educated populations (Martin, 1993). This situation not only sets up U.S. Americans as the center and the standard for cross-cultural comparisons but also silences the voices of less privileged groups (e.g., people in the underclass, racial and ethnic minorities) in the United States. Through this processing of silencing under the guise of a "shared" national culture, the agency of individuals who are not in the social elite is erased.

In sum, a historical analysis of the field of intercultural communication provides us with insights about how hegemonic conceptions of culture as nation-state came into existence. Influenced by the larger discursive landscape of intercultural communication, intercultural communication competence researchers adopted and embraced similar conceptions of culture in their theories and research. I outlined several problems with such hegemonic definitions of culture. Although such definitions have produced interesting, lively, and sometimes polarizing debates (e.g., Chesebro, 1998a, 1998b; Dodd, 1998; Ono, 1998), a number of scholars agree that current conceptualizations of culture must be questioned (Martin, 1993; Moon, 1996; Ono, 1998). Martin (1993) calls for the extension of current definitions of culture to include race, ethnicity, and gender, among others. Moon (1996) proposes that "'culture' signifies the intersections of various subject positions within any given society" (p. 76) and urges intercultural communication scholars to acknowledge and incorporate such intersections in the research. Similarly, Yep, Lovaas, and Ho (in press) insist that cultural experiences must be

understood as interplay and collision at the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality. They also call for a dialogical, creative, improvisational, and fluid conceptualization of culture featuring contradiction and change. Understanding how individuals navigate through the various contradictions and changes at the nexus of racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, and social class positionings can provide us with rich insights about "culture." Such analysis focuses on power relations. Let us now turn to power.

Putting Power Back Into Intercultural Communication

At a recent national conference, I participated on a panel on identity management and negotiation. When I stated that "We cannot talk about identity negotiation without examining power relations," silence filled the room, and eventually someone changed the subject. When I returned the discussion to power, one of the critics said, "It [meaning power] is not appropriate for inclusion in a middle-range theory." Discussions of power, like those of privilege, make people uncomfortable. However, when theorists, researchers, and teachers ignore power relations in their work, they are reproducing, maintaining, and perpetuating current structural inequalities, modes of domination, and social injustices under the disguise of knowledge consumption, production, and dissemination.

Power is a difficult concept. Power is omnipresent (i.e., power is everywhere), relational (i.e., power operates as an internal condition in all kinds of relationships—knowledge relationships, cultural relations, intimate relations), and hidden (e.g., power is not always visible). Foucault (1978) defined it as follows: "Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (p. 93). He further noted that "there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives" (p. 95). For example, affirmative action debates are about power. Similarly, arguments over political correctness (or "PC wars") in higher education, are about power in the process of knowledge production (Williams, 1995).

It is obvious that power is central in intercultural relations. Power is omnipresent at both macrocultural (e.g., diplomatic relations between national groups) and microcultural (e.g., an interaction between an immigration officer and an "undocumented alien") levels. To illustrate how power is intrinsic in all intercultural relationships, I use a cultural simulation called "The East-West Game" (Hoopes & Ventura, 1979). In the simulation, the class is divided into an "Eastern" and "Western" group with specific guidelines for interaction. The "Eastern" group is given a number of stereotypical attributes associated with Eastern cultures. For example, they are told that they are poor but proud, community-oriented, and indirect in their communication style (e.g., never saying "no" directly). Similarly, the "Western" group is given characteristics that exemplify many of the stereotypical assumptions about Western culture. For example, they are told that they are rich and powerful, individualistic, assertive, and goal-oriented. In the simulation, the "Western"

group visits the "Eastern" group so that the former can acquire a highly treasured cultural artifact from the East for exhibition at a major Western museum. Typically, the interactions between these groups vary from patronizing ("We are rich and we can help you") to threatening ("We can impose economic sanctions on you," or worse yet, "We can bomb your country if you do not release the artifact!"). Students realize that this is a simulation, yet they also recognize how political and economic power is present in their interactions with each other.

Although intercultural relations can be appropriately characterized as relations of power, current conceptualizations of intercultural communication competence generally ignore the role of power, and power differences between participants in a communication situation are generally not considered. In so doing, they implicitly assume that communication occurs in an even and equal power field. Unfortunately, this is one of the "unrealities"[5] in intercultural communication research.

Some researchers are beginning to acknowledge the role of power in intercultural research (e.g., Martin & Flores, 1998; Moon, 1996; Mumby, 1997). For example, Collier (1998) points out that intercultural communication competence is based on implicit privilege and the more dominant voices within a community decide what constitutes competent interaction. Alcoff (1995) reminds us of the dangers of speaking for others, for example, pointing out some of the problems of a privileged middle-class woman speaking for voiceless underclass women. Lee (1998) recommends that researchers acknowledge and reflect on their social position and its potential effects, for example, considering what the potential issues are that arise when a European American male academic writes about an "exotic culture" whose language he does not understand or speak. Tanno and Jandt (1994) call for greater collaboration between the researcher and the people being researched in an attempt to create a "team that co-produces" intercultural knowledge. West (1993) reminds us that the process of knowledge production is intricately related to relations between power and ideology.

Reclaiming Ideology in Intercultural Communication Theory and Research

Ideology is another difficult and contested concept (Cormack, 1992; McLellan, 1995; Storey, 1993; West, 1993). Storey (1993) identifies several definitions of ideology. Ideology can refer to a systematic body of ideas articulated by a group of people (the ideology of ESL teachers). Ideology can also refer to cultural texts and collective practices that present distorted images of reality in which the more powerful group conceals the dynamics of domination (capitalist ideology). Ideology is both a systematic set of ideas and a body of material practice (the celebration of Columbus Day to commemorate the "discovering" of America is both a body of ideas and a set of rituals and practices). Ideology can also be viewed as a struggle to restrict and fix particular connotations (the association of Arabs with international terrorism in news reporting). Storey notes that "culture and ideology do cover much the same

conceptual landscape . . . [and] the culture/ideology landscape is inescapably marked by relations of power and politics" (1993, p. 6).

Reminding us how ideology operates in everyday life, Lee (1993) writes: "Problems that receive institutional and financial support over a long period of time are usually those articulated by the powerful" (p. 221). Lee urges people to consider questions such as "Whose problems are articulated? Whose problems are ignored systematically?" (1993, p. 221) to uncover relations of power and politics.

According to Leeds-Hurwitz (1990), the field of intercultural communication was established to respond to a particular set of problems. More specifically, intercultural communication spawned and developed in the 1940s and 1950s from the need to train U.S. diplomats going to overseas assignments. Even though efforts to develop and refine intercultural communication theory increased in the 1980s, the pragmatic tradition continues. Intercultural communication has proliferated and expanded to include a much wider group of U.S. Americans going abroad like "all those involved in *international business* [my emphasis], today one of the largest markets for intercultural training" (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990, p. 264). The focus on corporate interests and international expansion of U.S. American cultural products—in short, cultural imperialism—must not be overlooked in intercultural communication. Therefore, that intercultural communication scholars and practitioners show an interest in competence, which focuses on appropriateness and effectiveness to accomplish specific goals, is hardly surprising.[6]

Remembering History in Intercultural Communication

History—whether political, national, ethnic, familial, or relational—is always present to some degree in our communication. However, much of the current theory and research in the field has been largely ahistorical, that is, little attention has been given to history in our work (Hardt & Brennen, 1993; Jansen, 1993; Stephen & Harrison, 1993). Hardt and Brennen (1993) elaborate: "The absence of history, linked to an absence of self-reflection, reinforces the status quo of theory and practice as ahistorical and uncritical" (p. 130).

History is particularly crucial in intercultural interactions. For example, my grandmother, a Chinese woman who lived through the Japanese occupation of China several decades ago, recalls the horrors that she personally experienced during that period. A couple of decades later, our family moved and my father and several Japanese men became friends. When my father's Japanese friends came to visit, my grandmother, a typically outgoing woman, remained very quiet and suspicious of the visitors. In this case, personal history became an invisible barrier to communication for my grandmother but not for the visitors who had little knowledge of those historical circumstances.

Sometimes group histories are barriers to communication. For example, difficulties in the relationships between Korean Americans and African

Americans in South Central Los Angeles have historical roots that go back several decades. Chang (1994) documents several factors that exacerbated conflict between these two groups: widespread perception of the proliferation of Korean businesses in South Central Los Angeles, resentment of African American merchants toward Korean store owners who increased competition in the area, perception of Korean Americans intruding and taking over a primarily African American neighborhood, and the role of the media in portraying Korean store owners as racist through the re-playing of the Latasha Harlins/Soon Ja Du incident when the latter killed the former for taking a bottle of orange juice from her store. This underscores the importance of group histories in communication.

Finally, colonial histories must also be recognized in intercultural communication. For example, some Peruvians who speak both Spanish and *quechua*, the language of the Incas, choose not to speak the latter because of the history of Spanish colonization in Peru that degraded, suppressed, dehumanized, debased, and negated the indigenous culture of the colonized.

The Centrality of Culture in Intercultural Communication Theory and Research

The field of intercultural communication has undergone tremendous growth in the last few decades. The discipline is currently both theory-driven and pragmatically-oriented (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990; Shutter, 1998). Much of the research focuses on microcultural analysis, the examination of smaller units of culture (the way culture affects how people view such concepts as space, time, intimacy, assertiveness, and identities). In such analysis, culture and communication are viewed as deeply interconnected. However, after reviewing much of the research in the field, Shutter (1998) concludes:

> Intercultural communication research between 1980 and 1995 has provided important validation studies of communication paradigms and significant breakthroughs in development of intercultural communication theory. However, the published research has neglected people, context, and…culture. As a result, interculturalists have provided precious few data-based insights into how *specific* [emphasis in the original] societies, world regions, and ethnic groups communicate. It is time for a change in direction. (p. 41)

Shutter further emphasizes, "The challenge for intercultural communication in the 1990s and the 21st century . . . *is to develop a research direction and teaching agenda that returns culture to preeminence* [emphasis mine]" (p. 39). In short, it is time to return to the lived everyday experiences of people in cultural communities to learn how they interact in general and how they communicate competently in particular.

"Other" Ways of Viewing Competence

In this final section, I explore "Other" ways of viewing intercultural communication competence. First, I argue that there is a need to move beyond current hegemonic conceptions of culture by examining communication at the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality, among others. Then, I propose Other (i.e., non-Eurocentric) ways to understand intercultural communication competence by highlighting the centrality of power in intercultural encounters. I conclude by reflecting on potential implications for engaged teaching and critical classroom practices.

I noted a number of critical issues in current intercultural communication theory—and intercultural communication competence—in the previous section. I examined some of the problems associated with dominant conceptions of culture as nation-state. It is time for another "rupture" in the field. I am not suggesting that another hegemonic notion of culture replace the current one. Instead, I propose that we develop multiple, multifaceted, contextual, provisional, and fluid conceptions of culture—a series of emergent voices.

One possibility to study how "culture" operates is by examining how individual subject positions (like race, class, gender, sexuality, among others) interplay and collide in interaction. Let me illustrate with an example. Several years ago, I was scheduled to teach an upper-division undergraduate course in gender communication, and only my last name was listed under "instructor." Because the class fulfills one of the general educational requirements, students from other departments and programs took the class. Most of them did not know me. When I arrived on the first day of class with syllabi and other class materials, I heard whispers in the room, "She must be sick…she must have sent him to give us the handouts." I introduced myself as the instructor and previewed what I planned to discuss that first day of class. Some students looked a little surprised, but nobody said anything. After discussing the syllabus, my course expectations, ground rules for discussion, and class policy, I introduced myself more personally and told the class that I was looking forward to learning about them and my hope was that they would learn from each other. They seemed to relax a little. "Before I proceed to ask you to introduce yourselves, are there any questions so far?" I inquired. A woman in the class raised her hand and said, "We expected you to be a woman!" She went on to explain that, in her experience, all the instructors for gender-related courses were women. I wanted to find out more and posed a question, "What does it mean to have a man of color teach this class?" A man then entered the exchange, "Good…because we don't want a 'hardcore' feminist preaching to us!" I quickly responded, "I don't know about preaching…but you have a feminist…no, actually a womanist[7] talking with you." There were looks of confusion and disbelief. I went on to explain my philosophy of teaching, my position on gender issues, and some of the differences between feminism and womanism. In this incident, we can see how gender, race, nationality—and possibly, social class and sexuality—came into play in the classroom interaction. Would the student have raised an objection to a "hardcore feminist preaching" to

them if I had been a woman? Would discussions of race, nationality, and sexuality have come up in the same way if the instructor had been a European American lesbian? I suspect not. Therefore, incorporating the multifaceted nature of social positions can provide researchers and practitioners with a more holistic understanding of the cultural experiences of people.

What about current hegemonic conceptualizations of intercultural communication competence? Once again, I suggest that we incorporate other voices in the discussion of competence. Personal narratives, autoethnographies of individuals engaged in border-crossing,[8] group stories, and folktales might offer us rich and insightful, historically-situated, highly contextual ways of understanding the meaning of competence based on individual social positions. Some of the writings of radical women of color, cultural workers, artists, writers, and engaged intellectuals, among many others (e.g., Alexander, 1996; Anzaldúa, 1987, 1990; Ferguson, Gever, Trinh, & West, 1990; Freire, 1970, 1973; 1998; Giroux, 1988, 1992, 1993; hooks, 1990, 1992, 1994; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Spivak, 1990; West, 1990, to name only a few) can provide non-Eurocentric perspectives of intercultural communication competence. For example, hooks (1984) notes that a person needs to locate himself or herself at the margin—a difficult but necessary place that provides the person with a way to see "outside in" and "inside out" (p. ix), a dual perspective or a double consciousness. Several years ago, I attended a conference on health as an invited participant on a panel focusing on sexuality. I immediately noticed that I was the only person of color on the panel. After our presentations, audience members asked questions and made comments. Whenever questions of culture came up, all the panelists looked at me as if expecting me to respond. I remained silent to assess the situation. After all, everyone has cultural experiences. "Is it because I am the token person of color here that I am marked as 'having culture'?" I wondered. I felt uncomfortable—as if I was being closely watched and examined. I felt different and marginal. Then someone became more direct and asked, "What is the Asian American perspective on this?" I quickly retorted, "I don't know about *the* Asian American perspective, but I can tell you the perspective of *one* Asian American" and proceeded to explain the problems with the category "Asian American" in terms of historical, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Most of the time, I feel that I am at the margin when I attend these conferences. I struggle between just "blending in" (but not really blending in as difference is written on my skin and apparent in my physical appearance) and standing out as a person of color in organizations that are primarily led and attended by European Americans. But standing at the margin, I have a different perspective about things. hooks (1990) calls the margin a "site of radical possibility" when she writes:

> [The margin is] a central location for the production of a counterhegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a mar-

> ginality one wishes to lose—to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center—but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds. (pp. 149-150)

From this perspective, competence might be a double vision, one that enables individuals to question the status quo and to shift power relations.

When both macrocultural (e.g., how cultural imperialism affects the lives of the less privileged) and microcultural (e.g., how racial, gender, sexual, and class oppression are discussed in the classroom) practices of power are used in a (re)conceptualization of intercultural communication competence, competent communication can then be viewed as the interactants' recovery of subjectivity and agency and (re)discovery of personal voice through personal and collective empowerment. For example, a former graduate student in the department, a woman from a middle-class family in Japan, came to the department to study culture and communication. After many months of reading and discussing seminar materials, she told me, "I did not see my oppression at first. I thought that the way some U.S. American men related to me, as someone they talked down to, was because of my English. But my English is not that bad…I am about to finish writing my Master's thesis! Why do they then treat me like a child? I don't think that it's my English anymore…and I have begun to relate to them differently." In this instance, she recovered her agency by refusing to conform to cultural stereotypes that restricted and prescribed her actions as a Japanese woman in the U.S.

It is quite apparent that intercultural communication competence, from a critical perspective, is drastically different from current conceptualizations in the field. Critical intercultural communication competence is not about imposing one's will nor about concealing modes of domination, in the name of appropriateness, in order to advance one's goals and reproduce current ideologies in an uneven landscape of power relations. Critical intercultural communication competence is about respectful dialogue, the restoration of subject-to-subject (as opposed to subject-to-object) relationships, personal and collective empowerment through (re)discovery of voice, and recovery of personal agency for the development of and expansion of possibilities for a radical democracy. Giroux and Shannon (1997a) add, "crucial to this democratic project is a conception of the political that is open yet committed, respects specificity without erasing global considerations, and provides new spaces for collaborative work engaged in productive social change" (p. 8).

What are the implications of this (re)conceptualization of intercultural communication competence for classroom teaching? Although a thorough discussion of pedagogical implications is beyond the scope of this article, I reflect on some potentially useful pedagogical practices for an engaged classroom (see also Yep, 1998a). A critical approach to intercultural communication competence is consistent with, and can be best practiced in the con-

text of, liberation education (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1998) or "critical pedagogy."[9] Critical pedagogy, according to Giroux and Shannon (1997a), raises "questions about how culture is related to power—why and how it operates in both institutional and textual terms—within and through a politics of representation" (p. 5). They further note that cultural texts, like media images, song lyrics, or descriptions of Others,

> become not merely serious objects of struggle over how meaning is constituted, but also practical sites that register how power operates so as to make some representations, images, and symbols under certain political conditions more valuable as representations of reality than others. [Cultural] texts in this instance become pedagogical sites through which educators and others might analyze the mechanisms that inform how a politics of representation operates within dominant regimes of meaning to produce and legitimate knowledge about gender, youth, race, sexuality, work…(p. 7)

In short, critical pedagogy provides the analytical tools to interrogate current cultural practices and representations and their relationship to power.

Mostern (1994) notes that there are two components that connect critical pedagogy to practice. First, a critical pedagogue "teaches from where the student is at, rather than from where the teacher is at" (p. 256), in other words, students bring with them a history of knowledge and experiences that serve as the context for the processing of new information and ideas. Mostern cautions us that "this does not mean that the teacher denies his or her pedagogical intentions or specific expertise, but merely that s/he respects the myriad expertise of the students that s/he does not share" (p. 256). In an earlier example I described a European American student who was furious with me when I discussed issues of white privilege which he disputed and denied. Instead of convincing him that his race, gender, and sexuality gave him unearned privilege in numerous situations (such as the expectation to be protected, rather than harassed, by the police), I simply acknowledged his fury and invited him to contemplate what the rage meant to him. In this difficult situation, I respected where he was at, and at the same time, I did not change my pedagogical intentions to present ideas of privilege and their material consequences for discussion in the classroom.

Second, Mostern (1994) maintains that a critical pedagogue "works for social justice, and, living in a world of injustice, not only attempts to enact change in his or her classroom, but develops the strategies and confidence of students to work for social change beyond the classroom" (p. 256). For example, I discuss in the classroom issues of cultural representations in the media—images and depictions of Arabs, Chinese, Indians, Irish, Jews, Mexicans, South Africans, to name only a few—on television, in film, and in the news. After providing students with some methodological and analytical tools in our classroom discussions of cultural representations, I

invite them to examine representations of a cultural group of their choice in greater depth. I also discuss ways in which cultural groups have resisted dominant representations and offer the students opportunities to investigate and explore alternative and more empowering representations. Over the years, students have examined how African American women, Native Americans, or Palestinians create new spaces for representation of their cultural and community life that shatter popular and simplistic cultural stereotypes. Others elect to study how people living with HIV/AIDS, houseless individuals, and other groups, challenge dominant cultural prescriptions and stereotypes. Still others get involved in community organizing, activism, and advocacy.

To conclude, intercultural communication, from a critical perspective, brings power back and positions it at the core of all cultural exchanges and interactions. Intercultural communication competence then becomes the process through which power is (re)negotiated and personal agency is (re)claimed. Those of us who are involved in teaching and researching culture—including language teachers, cultural workers, and intercultural specialists—are, as Giroux (1997) reminds us,

> always implicated in the dynamics of social power and knowledge that [we] produce, mediate, and legitimate in [our] classrooms. In this perspective, intellectual work is incomplete unless it self-consciously assumes responsibility for its effects in the larger public culture…[to] extend and deepen democratic public life. (p. 237)

It is my hope that critical (re)conceptualizations of intercultural communication competence can provide the space to imagine and create new worlds when individuals from different social locations come together.

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Endnotes

[1] I have always have been troubled with the notion of intercultural communication competence. In this essay I attempt to provide a sketch of some of the ideas that I find troublesome about current conceptualizations of competence. As "personal notes," these ideas are not completely developed. I hope that through my sharing, discussion and dialogue will ensue.

2 I am using this term to indicate dialogue in the Bakhtinian sense, that is, a multivocal exchange characterized by simultaneous unity (individuals committed to a joint discussion) and difference (distinct, possibly contradictory, points of view). See Bakhtin (1984), Holquist (1990), and Baxter and Montgomery (1996). I dedicate this essay to Mark Elkin, Karen Lovaas, and Emma Negrón, members of my "family of choice," with whom I have had numerous hours of dialogic exchange on communication across differences. I also thank Maria Rogers-Pascual, Marlon Mendieta, Philip Ho, Jennifer Mushnick, Scott Schönfeldt-Aultman, and Keiko Ozeki, among others, who have contributed, implicitly or explicitly, to this dialogue.

3 When I first started teaching as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) during my doctoral training at the University of Southern California in the 1980s, there were no graduate courses in intercultural communication theory, research, or pedagogy. According to the departmental collective memories, I was the first international GTA. After several years of successful teaching as a GTA, I was assigned to teach my own upper-division undergraduate course in intercultural communication. Although I have taught this course for many years now, my own theoretical shifts from primarily functionalist and interpretive perspectives to increasingly critical and postcolonial approaches are reflected in both course content and pedagogical style. For a discussion of these approaches to culture and communication, see Martin & Nakayama (1999, 2000). I am writing this essay today from the perspective of a critical intercultural communication scholar, teacher, and practitioner.

4 I am using quotation marks around the term "homeless" to call attention to the idea that this identity is constructed by more powerful others such as politicians, policymakers, and journalists. In agreement with Dollar's (2000) work with houseless youth, I, too, prefer to use the term "houseless" which is an identity that these young men have chosen for themselves in her study.

5 I am borrowing this term from Professor Wen Shu Lee. In our conversations about the field of culture and communication, Lee uses the notion of "unreality" to highlight, demystify, and engage in prophetic criticism (West, 1990) about how our theorizing does not reflect the lived experiences of people in cultural communities.

6 I am not arguing that conceptualizing intercultural communication competence in this manner is not useful. My point here is to call attention to the underlying ideology in this work.

7 I prefer to use the term "womanist"—as opposed to "feminist"—because it is much more inclusive. A womanist is a person (male, female, transgender)

who struggles against the injustices of gender at the nexus of other inter-locking axes of oppression including race, social class, sexuality, and nation-ality, among others. See Alice Walker (1983), bell hooks (1990), and Wen Shu Lee (1999).

[8] A "border-crosser" is an individual who inhabits two or more cultural spaces—the cultural borderlands—and yet does not belong to any of them. See Anzaldúa (1987).

[9] Although cultural studies (including critical theory) and critical pedagogy have common roots, critical theorists have only recently begun to examine the implications of their work in education (Grossberg, 1994). For current attempts to integrate cultural studies and education, see Giroux and McLaren (1994) and Giroux and Shannon (1997b).

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