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2 From Communicative Competence to Intercultural Communicative Competence: A Retrospect

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The notion of "Communicative Competence" has often been discussed in view of the challenges that intercultural interactions pose to the notion itself, especially as the notion was originally conceived by abstracting it from multicultural environments. From the 1990s a new idea challenged the notion, which was that any interaction is in some sense an encounter between different cultures and that interaction between speakers coming from different countries is only an extreme condition of this. Thus, the idea of "intercultural communicative competence" has been introduced to complement the idea of communicative competence. The discussion has led to define the concept of "intercultural speaker" as a reference point for a theory of communicative practices in multicultural environments as well as the notion of Intercultural Communicative Competence. The present article presents the debate that starts from the definition of "Communicative Competence" and has brought the field to today's models of "Intercultural Communicative Competence".

Keywords:
communication, intercultural communication, communicative competence, intercultural communicative competence, interactional sociolinguistics

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2.1 Introduction

In the field of studies on communication the notion of "Communicative Competence", originally proposed by Hymes (1972), has often been discussed in view of the challenges that intercultural interactions pose to the notion itself, which is based upon native speaker competence. Starting from the 1990s preeminent in the conceptualization of "communicative competence" was the idea that any interaction is in some sense an encounter between different cultures and that interaction between speakers coming from different countries is in some way only an extreme condition. Thus, the idea of "intercultural communicative competence" has been introduced in the discussion on defining communicative competence, whereby the notion of native speaker has been replaced with that of "intercultural speaker" as a reference point for theorizing of communicative practices (Byram & Zarate, 1994) and the notion of Intercultural Communicative Competence has been proposed (Byram, 1997). In the present article the main points of the debate will be discussed briefly, which starting from the 1960s' definition of "Language Competence" and "Communicative Competence" has brought the field to today's models of "Intercultural Communicative Competence".

2.2 Communication

The term "communication" stems from the Latin word communication, which ultimately derives from communis ('common, shared'); this has the same root as communio ('union, participation'). Communication therefore designates an act of sharing, in which two or more individuals share the same common condition; more precisely it refers to a process through which the participants share information.

The notion of "communication" can be meant in a broad or a narrow sense. In a broad sense communication means any process of transmission of information. In this sense everything can communicate something and is susceptible to being interpreted. In a narrow sense communication means instead a passage of information voluntarily produced by a "sender" in order to transmit information to a "recipient".

Based on the man-machine communication model C.E. Shannon and W. Weaver (Shannon, 1948; Shannon & Weaver, 1948) envisaged communication as a process involving five basic components (see Fig. 1): a source, a transmitter, a channel, a receiver, and a destination. The source of information – "sender" – is usually a person who decides which message to send and how to codify it, using a sequence of letters, sounds, gestures, images, etc. The transmitter translates the message into a signal. The channel is the way through which signals are transmitted, for instance sound waves (as in everyday verbal communication), printed textual material (as in a letter, newspaper), radio waves (as in radio transmission), electrical wires (as in communication through information technology), light, etc. The receiver translates the signal back into a message, which is then interpreted by the destination, the person for whom the message was intended.

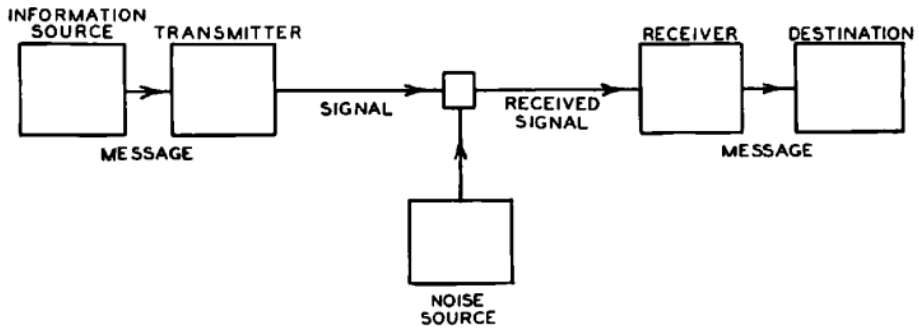

Figure 1: Communication system according to Shannon (1948: 381).
Source: Shannon (1948: 381)

A somewhat similar model is provided by Jakobson (1956 [1985]), who singles out six constitutive factors in verbal communication (see Fig. 2): the message, the addresser (the person who sends the message), the addressee (the person for whom the message is intended), the context or referent, the code, the set of conventional signs at least partially common to the addresser (the "encoder" of the message) and addressee (the "decoder" of the message), the contact, a physical channel between the addresser and the addressee.

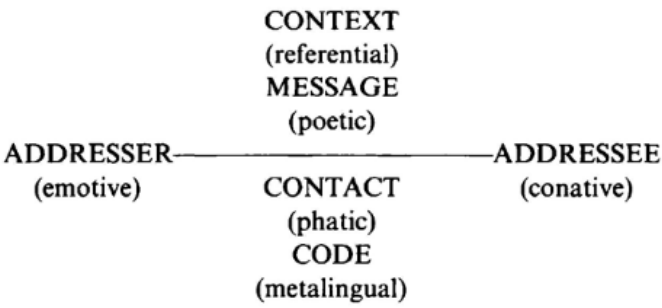

Figure 2: Jakobson's (1954 [1985]: 113) model of verbal communication.
Source:Jakobson's (1954 [1985]: 113)

According to these models, linguistic communication consists of a process of coding and decoding of messages. The success of communication depends exclusively on the shared knowledge of a linguistic code by addresser and addressee and on the presence of an unhindered connection between the two ("noise" is managed).

These models envisage communication as a unidirectional activity; the recipient of the communication is passive, as is testified by terms such as "destination", "addressee" and "receiver"; the context does not affect the communication process.

However, communication is not normally unidirectional: in everyday life most communicative activity is dialogical and it is certainly more pertinent and useful to refer to communication as a reciprocal exchange of information.

The word "dialogue" comes from the Greek, dialégein: dià- is a preposition meaning "through"; légein means "to speak", but also "to bind", "to gather". Dialogue presupposes a relationship effort that passes through acknowledging the other as an interlocutor whose contribution in a communicative activity cooperatively enriches knowledge. Communication as dialogical activity is then an exchange, not a one-way process, as well as a process both sender and receiver are active agents: communication as dialogue implies feedback and renegotiation of roles by the participants in the exchange.

Moreover, the models of communication described above fail to capture that context may affect communication. Imagine for instance that interlocutor A utters "I have no money" replying to a request by interlocutor B to join her for dinner at

a restaurant. The sentence does not express in itself a rejection of the invitation. The mere decoding of the conventional meaning of the statement "I have no money" does not allow interlocutor B to understand the message encoded by interlocutor A. Rather, it is necessary for B to integrate the decoding of the message with an inference, i.e. a reasoning having a starting point the decoding of the message expressed by A and by (trivial) non-linguistic information such as "you have to pay for a dinner in a restaurant", "without money it is not possible to have dinner in a restaurant", etc.

All in all, Shannon-Weaver and Jakobson models are appropriate for describing dynamics such as those that take place in simple communicative processes (for instance the ones established by the road traffic code), or in cases of instrumental communication in view of an objective. As for linguistic communication a model that allows us to account for what are clearly more complex processes is needed. This becomes even more apparent if we consider communicative practices in nowadays complex societies.

In this perspective, modern sociolinguistics studies the linguistic facts and phenomena that have social relevance and the variations in the use of language depending on the social and situational variables. Sociolinguistics considers communication as a way to reproduce, transmit and transform the social meanings around which a linguistic community recognizes itself. Communication is indicative of a social group as defined by the values, traditions, norms, and expectations shared by its members and of the relationships between the interlocutors as defined by hierarchies and social roles. Through communication practices a society and its culture, understood as a set of material and immaterial components that characterize the daily life of a social group, are constituted and redefined.

2.3 Communicative competence

The debate on the definition of an adequate model of verbal communication has gone hand in hand with the discussion about how communicative effectiveness can be defined. "Communicative competence" is a focal notion in this respect.

The concept was first discussed by Hymes (1972) in reaction to Chomsky's (1965) distinction between "competence" and "performance". The first term was intended as the implicit knowledge of language of "an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly" (Chomsky, 1965, 3). So conceived, the notion was opposed to "performance", which refers to the actual use of language. Scholars in the field of sociolinguistics, interactional sociolinguistics and ethnography of communication opposed the idea of "linguistic competence" as introduced by Chomsky, whose theory of competence "posits ideal objects in abstraction from sociocultural features that might enter into their description" (Hymes, 1972, 271). Such a step is legitimate, according to Hymes, but the complexity of language usage goes far beyond the postulate of an ideal speaker-listener in a perfectly monolingual community. In multilingual communities fluent speakers of different varieties "regard their languages, or functional varieties, as not identical in communicative adequacy" (Hymes, 1972, 274). This of course has nothing to do with Chomsky's idea of "competence", but still is a significant aspect of linguistic competence and holds true even for communities where an homogeneous code is used: "the competency of users of language entails abilities and judgments relative to, and interdependent with, sociocultural features" (Hymes, 1972, 277). Thus the fact that a theory of linguistic competence should be able to account for is that "a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate" (Hymes, 1972, 277). The acquisition of this competence, which is labelled "communicative competence" is sociocultural and is part of competence concerning other codes of communicative conduct.

In the 1970s and 1980s many sociolinguistics and scholars in the field of applied linguistics devoted themselves to further develop the concept of communicative competence.

Savignon (1972, 1983) described communicative competence as "the ability to function in a truly communicative setting – that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors" (Savignon, 1972, 8). Because of this, communicative competence corresponds in her opinion to language proficiency (for a similar take, see also Taylor, 1988).

Canale and Swain (1980, 1981) provided an outline of the basic ingredients for a theory of communicative competence, which in their view must include three systems of knowledge, namely grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence is defined in terms of Chomsky's competence, i.e. as a set of grammatical rules mapping expressions to meanings. Sociolinguistic competence includes the rules needed to determine the social meaning and adequacy of utterances, so that language is understood and used appropriately in different sociolinguistic and sociocultural contexts ("sociocultural rules"); sociolinguistic competence also includes components such as rules for determining the cohesion and coherence of oral and written texts ("rules of discourse"), which in a later version of the model (Canale, 1983, 1984) are part of a fourth component named "discourse competence". Strategic competence consists of verbal and nonverbal strategies used to manage breakdowns in communication due to performance failures or to insufficient grammatical or sociolinguistic competence.

Table 1: Canale and Swain's Model of Communicative Competence (see also Whyte, 2019, 3).

Communicative Competence		
Grammatical Competence	**Sociolinguistic Competence**	**Strategic Competence**
Knowledge of - lexical items - rules of phonology morphology syntax sentence-grammar semantics	Use of - sociocultural rules - rules of discourse	- verbal and non-verbal - repair of breakdowns

Widdowson (1983) introduced the distinction between competence and capacity. Communicative competence is to be understood in terms of the knowledge of linguistic and sociolinguistic conventions. Capacity (or procedural/communicative capacity) is instead conceived as the ability to use knowledge as a way to create meaning in a language, that is, the ability of implementing what Halliday (1978, 39; 1985, xiv) called the "meaning potential".

Van Ek (1986) also proposed a model of "communicative ability". In his model he particularly stressed the social and socio-cultural component of communicative competence. Communicative competence includes six components, which are to be

meant as different aspects of a comprehensive ability: Linguistic competence, i.e. "the ability to produce and interpret meaningful utterances which are formed in accordance with the rules of the language concerned and bear their conventional meaning ... that meaning which native speakers would normally attach to an utterance when used in isolation" (van Ek, 1986, 39); Sociolinguistic competence, involving "the awareness of ways in which the choice of language forms … is determined by such conditions as setting, relationship between communication partners, communicative intention, etc." (ibid., 41); Discourse competence, "The ability to use appropriate strategies in the construction and interpretation of texts" (ibid., 47); Strategic competence, involving the skill of "finding ways of 'getting our meaning across' or 'finding out what somebody means'"; it includes communication strategies such as rephrasing and asking for clarification (ibid., 55); sociocultural competence, which concerns the awareness that "every language is situated in a sociocultural context and implies the use of a particular reference frame which is partly different from that of the foreign language learner" (ibid., 35); finally, social competence, which includes "both the will and the skill to interact with others, involving motivation, attitude, self-confidence, empathy and the ability to handle social situations (ibid., 65).

In the 1990s more complex theories of communicative competence were introduced. Bachman (1990) introduce the model of communicative language ability, which was later revised in Bachman and Palmer (1996). Bachman and Palmer defined "language ability" as the integration of language competence ("language knowledge", Bachman and Palmer, 1996, 67) and strategic competence.

Language competence includes two main components, organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge.

Organizational knowledge consists of abilities needed to manage formal language structures, such as grammatical and textual principles and rules. Grammatical knowledge in its turn includes control over phonology, morphology, syntax, vocabulary, and orthography. Textual knowledge is responsible for comprehension and production of spoken or written texts and includes "knowledge of cohesion" and "knowledge of rhetorical or conversational organization".

Pragmatic knowledge is understood as the set of abilities for creating and interpreting discourse. It includes two components, "functional knowledge" (or "illocutionary knowledge", Bachmann, 1990) and of "sociolinguistic knowledge". The former consists of knowledge of pragmatic norms needed to express acceptable language functions and to interpret the illocutionary force of utterances, enabling a speaker to capture the communicative intentions; it includes four more functions: "ideational", "manipulative", "instrumental", and "imaginative". The latter amounts to knowledge of sociolinguistic norms needed to create appropriate expressions in a given social context.

In Bachman and Palmer's model (1996) language knowledge is complemented by strategic competence, which they define as "a set of metacognitive components, or strategies, which can be thought of as higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function in language use" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, 70). Strategic competence consists of abilities needed to set one's communicative goal, to assess the desirability of goals and one's own language knowledge, and to plan communicative tasks.

2.4 Intercultural communication

Because of their own physiological characteristics, cultural influences, experiences and relationships that characterize their biography, any individual builds their own particular point of view on the world, which can never exactly correspond to that of someone else. People belonging to the same community normally share a cultural and experiential context, which facilitates mutual understanding, but at the same time there is inevitably a gap between different perspectives (Hannerz, 1992).

We can therefore say, with Singer (1987), that any communication is in a way intercultural, and that each of us functions interculturally whenever we communicate with someone else. Simmel (1908), at the beginning of the last century, recognized that any relationship is characterized by a mixture of closeness and distance, which then in a particular combination produce the relationship with the foreigner.

Modern societies, characterized by the presence of individuals having their background in different cultures, and global scenarios, where people from different cultures are in contact, do not actually introduce a totally new situation to

communication, but rather take to the extreme the question concerning interpersonal communication: the utterance of the other, whether from the same culture or a different one, always has a margin of opacity and always partially escapes our efforts of understanding.

Now, according to the first of Watzlawick, Beavin, Jackson's (1967) "metacommunication axiom", "one cannot, not communicate": even when one refuses to communicate verbally, their body occupies a portion of space and cannot avoid adopting a posture; postures, like any other behavior, necessarily communicate something. So even when one tries to maintain a neutral posture, avoids gesturing and controls facial expressions (all elements of non-verbal communication), they do communicate something: even immobility communicates something (Watzlawick's «postural silence»), for instance unavailability to engage with another, rejection of the situation, discomfort, extraneousness, etc.

The same axiom applies to intercultural communication, too. If communicating cannot been avoided, communicating as a process deeply influenced by a specific culture cannot be avoided. As Hall (1966, 1) puts it, "communication constitutes the core of culture and indeed of life itself". This tenet has a particularly relevant impact in the global world.

The visibility and widespread awareness of the relationship between cultures in today's world, the physical and mediated contiguity between cultures is such that the need of a theory of intercultural communication was raised as early as the 1980s and 1990s (see Kim and Gudykunst, 1988; Roger and Steinfatt, 1999; for a short outline of the emergence of the discipline, see Giaccardi, 2002).

As Giaccardi (2002, 11ff.) points out, intercultural communication can work on two levels. The first level is the exchange of messages in the contexts of daily life. Today opportunities for intercultural contact are increasingly numerous; thus developing tools in order to make the interaction as efficient as possible, avoiding misunderstandings, gaffes and diplomatic incidents is essential. In this respect a theory of intercultural communication should aim to define the existential components of intercultural competence and the abilities needed to effectively communicate in an intercultural setting. At this level a theory of intercultural communication concerns primarily an understanding of how communication

practices and techniques work in an intercultural scenario so that individuals involved in such situations are able to manage communication appropriately and efficiently, developing what has been called "intercultural communicative competence" (Byram, 1997). We will return to this point shortly.

However, intercultural communication cannot be reduced to this level, which is contingent to specific communicative contexts. There is a deeper level that must be taken into consideration, which concerns the cultural assumptions that shape practices, i.e. the frames of reference for communicative action. In this sense, studies in the field of intercultural communication are not only aimed at developing a set of tools and strategies to achieve communicative goals, but also at providing models of intercultural communication and, on the applicative side, tools to develop awareness of one's assumptions about oneself and to rethink the relationship between cultures and the very idea of culture – that is "intercultural competence".

2.5 Intercultural competence

Byram (1997) proposes five factors defining intercultural competence: knowledge of self and other ("savoir"), attitudes relativizing self and valuing the other ("savoir être"), skills concerning interpreting and relating ("savoir comprendre"), skills concerning discovery and/or interaction ("savoir apprendre/faire"), and political education ("savoir s'engager").

By "Knowledge" Byram (1997, 35) meant the set of notions individuals have and bring to an interaction with someone from a different culture concerning their own culture and the interlocutor's culture; moreover it includes "knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels" (ibid.).

By "Attitudes" ("savoir être") Byram (1997, 34) meant "attitudes towards people who are perceived as different in respect of the cultural meanings, beliefs and behaviours they exhibit, which are implicit in their interaction with interlocutors from their own social groups or others". Curiosity, openness, readiness to suspend disbelief or judgment of others' meanings and beliefs as well as willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings are the precondition for successful intercultural interaction.

By "Skills" concerning interpreting and relating ("savoir comprendre") Byram (1997, 37) means an individual's ability to interpret information created in a different cultural setting by resorting to "general frames of knowledge which will allow them to discover the allusions and connotations present in the document". This type of ability is to be distinguished from the skills of discovery and interaction ("savoir apprendre/faire") in that the former do not necessarily involve interaction with an interlocutor, as it may be limited to interpretation of written documents. "Savoir apprendre/faire", on the other hand, may be part of social interaction and "comes into play where the individual has no, or only a partial existing knowledge framework" Byram (1997, 37, 38). More specifically, this ability consists in "building up specific knowledge as well as an understanding of the beliefs, meanings and behaviours" Byram (1997, 38). This amounts to being able to "recognise significant phenomena in a foreign environment and to elicit their meanings and connotations" (ibid.), to manage dysfunctions arising in the course of interaction and to mediate cultural incidents.

Finally "Political Education" ("savoir s'engager") is understood in Byram (1997) as "the ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries (Byram, 1997, 53).

More recent contributions have focused on input and output of the process of gaining intercultural competence and on a more precise definition of the skills involved in the process. Deardorff (2004, 2006 and subsequent works) proposed a dynamic model of intercultural competence (see Fig. 3). Dervin (2010) provides a more fine grained definition on Byram's "savoir faire" (separating the cultural identification process – "savoir faire I" – from attention to discourses and cultural representations within them, including the ability to detect stereotypes and prejudices – "savoir faire II") and introducing an additional component, "savoir réagir/agir", concerning one's ability to manage emotions and behaviors in situations of misunderstanding or disagreeing.

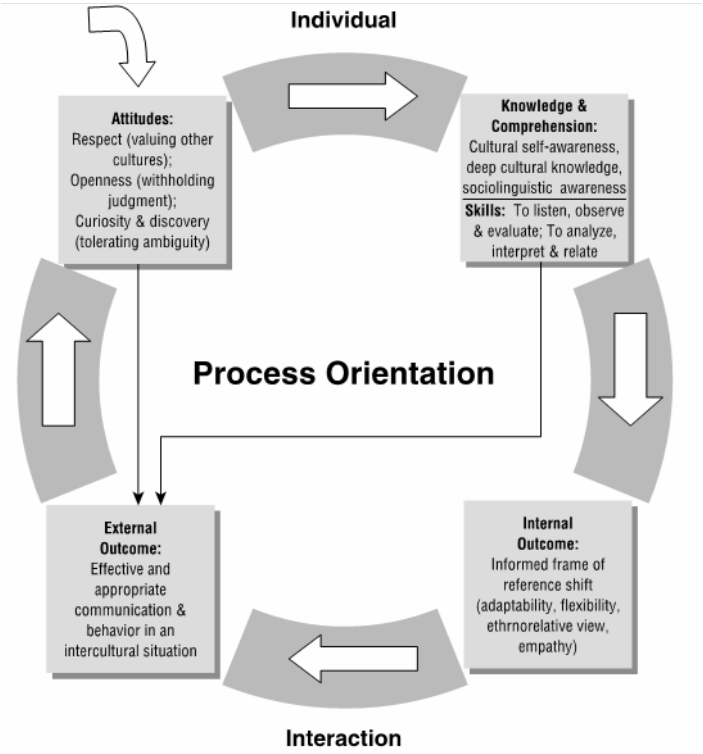

Figure 3: Deardorff's (2004, 2006) Model of Intercultural Competence.
Source: Deardorff

2.6 Intercultural Communicative Competence

If we now turn to the notion of communicative competence and consider it in the perspective of intercultural communication, we notice that essential features of the latter are not easily included in models of communicative competence. Because of this, since the 1990s Communicative competence has begun to be rethought in the perspective of the intercultural scenarios.

Byram (1997) is a seminal work in this respect, as it first highlighted the importance of the language component in defining intercultural communication, separated out intercultural competence from intercultural communicative competence, that is, the communicative competence owned by an intercultural speaker.

Although the model of intercultural competence includes features concerning communicative competence in that skills involving interaction are part of the overall picture, no specificities are made explicit as for the modes of interactions: one may achieve effective intercultural communication through an interpreter, for instance. However, an implicit assumption in framing intercultural communicative competence is that the dominant mode of interaction with individuals having a different culture will be through one's own use of foreign languages, especially in spoken exchange.

In defining Intercultural Communicative Competence, Byram (1997, 48) rephrased van Ek's (1986) dimensions of Communicative Competence in view of his model of intercultural communication and intercultural competence. Thus, while he accepted van Elk's components of social competence, social-cultural competence and strategic competence, he redefined linguistic competence as "the ability to apply knowledge of the rules of a standard version of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written language"; sociolinguistic competence is defined as "the ability to give to the language produced by an interlocutor whether native speaker or not meanings which are taken for granted by the interlocutor or which are negotiated and made explicit with the interlocutor"; discourse competence is understood as "the ability to use, discover and negotiate strategies for the production and interpretation of monologue or dialogue texts which follow the conventions of the culture of an interlocutor or are negotiated as intercultural texts for particular purposes". While retaining van Elk's structuring, these formulations include components of Byram's model of intercultural communication.

Moreover Byram (1997, 12f.) points out that another relevant dimension of intercultural communicative competence concerns the non-verbal component of communication, which was defined in Argyle (1983). Argyle points out that different cultures and the related communicative practices may vary with respect to non-verbal communication and because of this "when people from two different cultures meet, there is infinite scope for misunderstanding and confusion" (Argyle, 1983, 189).

It has to be noticed that this complex set of abilities were accommodated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001), where "General competences" includes "Declarative knowledge" (Byram's "Savoir")

relating sociocultural knowledge and intercultural awareness as well as the other "Savoirs" (CEFR, 2001, 102ff.; see also Piccardo et al., 2011, 35, CEFR, 2020, 102).

2.7 Conclusions

As Jackson (2012: 1) points out, "Across the globe, migration, travel, business and international education are facilitating face-to-face intercultural contact", and "as we become increasingly interconnected, the demand for individuals who can communicate effectively and appropriately with people who have a different cultural/linguistic background becomes ever more pressing". Understanding how communication between individual having different cultural background works, and defining which factors it involves, what skills it requires, how to teach them and how to evaluate the teaching progress is of foremost importance in order to promote efficient communication in intercultural settings. In the present work, an attempt has been made to summarize the proposals that have been put forward in recent decades to answer these questions.

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