26
Interactional Competence in Language Learning, Teaching, and Testing

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What is interactional competence? The term has been used by different scholars with different shades of meaning in several different areas of second language learning, teaching, and testing. In the pages that follow, I review some uses of the terms, but let's begin with an example of cross-cultural communication that brings into relief the fact that command of language forms is not enough to ensure successful communication. In her book on the ethnography of communication, Saville-Troike (1989, pp. 131–132) reported the following exchange in a kindergarten classroom on the Navajo Reservation:

> A Navajo man opened the door to the classroom and stood silently, looking at the floor. The Anglo-American teacher said "Good morning" and waited expectantly, but the man did not respond. The teacher then said "My name is Mrs. Jones," and again waited for a response. There was none.
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> In the meantime, a child in the room put away his crayons and got his coat from the rack. The teacher, noting this, said to the man, "Oh, are you taking Billy now?" He said, "Yes."
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> The teacher continued to talk to the man while Billy got ready to leave, saying "Billy is such a good boy," "I'm so happy to have him in class," etc.
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> Billy walked towards the man (his father), stopping to turn around and wave at the teacher on his way out and saying, "Bye-bye." The teacher responded, "Bye-bye." The man remained silent as he left.

Saville-Troike explained the interaction as one in which two of the three parties were interpreting the conversational exchange in different ways. From a Navajo perspective, the Navajo man's silence is appropriate and respectful; his silence after the Anglo-American teacher's greeting is also a polite response to her greeting and, if he had identified himself by name, the man would have broken a traditional taboo that prohibits Navajos from saying their own name. The Anglo-American teacher follows her own expectations that her greeting would be returned and that the unknown man would identify himself. Billy, who is more used to Anglo ways than his father, displayed interactional competence by taking his leave of the teacher in the way she expected while his father remained silent.

What, then, is interactional competence (henceforth IC)? An examination of what these individuals did in this interaction reveals at least four aspects. The first is the fact that IC may be observed (or its absence noted) in spoken interaction. Almost all of the research on IC has focused exclusively

on spoken interaction; if written language has been considered at all, it has played a very minor role in multimodal interaction. Although writing has not been considered as contributing substantially to IC, nonverbal semiotic resources such as gesture, gaze, posture, kinesics, and proxemics are frequently considered, as indeed are verbal prosody, rhythm, and intonation.

IC can be observed (or its absence noted) in a discursive practice. Discursive practices are recurring episodes of social interaction in context, episodes that are of social and cultural significance to a community of speakers. Such episodes have been called interactive practices (Hall, 1995), communicative practices (Hanks, 1996), while Tracy (2002) and Young (2007, 2008, 2009) use the term *discursive practice*. In Saville-Troike's example, greeting, leave-taking, and picking up a child from school are all discursive practices because they are episodes of spoken interaction that occur regularly and have significance in a community of speakers. Because discursive practices recur, participants have expectations about what happens in a practice and what linguistic and nonverbal resources people employ in constructing the practice. Thus, a second aspect of IC involves participants recognizing and responding to expectations of what to say and how to say it. These expectations lead participants to interpret forms of talk in a given practice with conventional meanings and may lead to misinterpretations when forms of talk do not meet their expectations. Such cross-cultural difficulties were described by Saville-Troike in her comments on the encounter between the Navajo man and the Anglo teacher. She wrote that, "[t]he encounter undoubtedly reinforced the teacher's stereotype that Navajo's are 'impolite' and 'unresponsive,' and the man's stereotype that Anglo-Americans are 'impolite' and 'talk too much'" (p. 132).

Viewing IC as simply a pragmatic match between cultural expectations and observed forms of talk in a discursive practice may lead us to believe that IC is simply a question of pragmatics, but this would be a mistake. Pragmatic meaning, as defined by Kasper and Rose (2002), arises "from choices between linguistic forms." Such choices are, however, "not unconstrained but are governed by social conventions, which can be flexed to different, contextually varying degrees but only entirely set aside at the peril of losing claims to face, insider status, or sanity" (pp. 2–3). The view of IC as essentially pragmatic competence is one underlying Hall's (1999, p. 137) oft-cited definition of the term as knowledge of:

> (1) the goals of the interactive practice, the roles of the participants, and the topics and themes considered pertinent; (2) the optional linguistic action patterns along which the practice may unfold, their conventional meanings, and the expected participation structures; (3) the amount of flexibility one has in rearranging or changing the expected uses of the practice's linguistic resources when exercising these options and the likely consequences engendered by the various uses; and (4) the skill to mindfully and efficiently recognize situations where the patterns apply and to use them when participating in new experiences to make sense of the unknown.

However, pragmatic meaning in a discursive practice takes us only part of the way to understanding IC for, as Mehan (1982) wrote, "'Competence' becomes interactional in two senses of the term. One, it is the competence necessary for effective interaction. Two, it is the competence that is available in the interaction between people" (p. 65). Mehan's stress on interaction in IC was taken up later by Kramsch (1986, p. 367), who wrote:

> Whether it is a face-to-face interaction between two or several speakers, or the interaction between a reader and a written text, successful interaction presupposes not only a shared knowledge of the world, the reference to a common external context of communication, but also the construction of a shared internal context or "sphere of inter-subjectivity" that is built through the collaborative efforts of the interactional partners.

Kramsch called the basis of successful interaction *interactional competence*, and it is Kramsch's view that forms the basis for contemporary understandings of the competence that is created by all

participants in social interaction. The definition of IC that I will use here includes the pragmatic relationship between participants' employment of linguistic and interactional resources and the contexts in which they are employed. However, the third aspect of IC is not the ability of a single individual to employ those resources in any and every social interaction; rather, IC is how those resources are employed mutually and reciprocally by all participants in a particular discursive practice. This means that IC is not the knowledge or the possession of an individual person, but is co-constructed by all participants in a discursive practice, and IC varies with the practice and with the participants.

A fourth and final aspect of IC is the realization that discursive practices are not circumscribed by the time and place of occurrence, but must be viewed in a wider social and historical context. In research in anthropology by Bourdieu (1977, 1990), Ortner (1984), and Sahlins (1981, 1985) that led to the development of Practice Theory, of which discursive practice is an outcome, context is an essential part of practice. Context is larger than the place and time of interaction, and includes the network of physical, spatial, temporal, social, interactional, institutional, political, and historical circumstances in which participants do a practice. The relationship between context and practice is a complex one but it is not arbitrary. In the interaction described by Saville-Troike, for example, IC can be seen in the identities that Billy, his father, and the teacher attempt to establish through their interaction. For instance, in describing the Navajo man's reluctance to state his name, it is not enough to say that this is simply a Navajo custom, but we must understand the wider context of the role of personal names in Navajo life, the contexts in which personal names are spoken, and the occasions on which practices of naming are transgressed. The same goes for understanding the Anglo-American teacher's naming action: "My name is Mrs. Jones." How does the teacher's naming herself in this way construct her identity? What are the values associated with overtly naming oneself in Anglo-American culture? What are the meanings that the teacher creates by naming herself as "Mrs. Jones" rather than "Ms. Jones", or "Sally Jones", or simply "Sally"? And is naming oneself what Agar (1980) called a "rich point"—a departure from our expectations that signals a difference between Anglo-American and Navajo culture and gives direction to subsequent learning?

To summarize, then, the notion of IC has been used by different scholars in different ways, of which four aspects are foundational. First, discussions of IC have focused largely on spoken interaction, although nonverbal aspects of spoken interaction have often been seen as important. Second, in many discussions, the pragmatics of interaction—the relationships between the forms of talk chosen by participants and the social contexts in which they are used—has been considered as fundamental to IC. Third, IC is not to be described in the knowledge and actions of an individual participant in an interaction; instead, IC is the construction of a shared mental context through the collaboration of all interactional partners. Finally, the context of an interaction is not limited to the sequence of talk that occurs at a specific time and place; understanding IC thus requires an investigation of social, institutional, political, and historical circumstances that extend beyond the horizon of a single interaction.

Applied linguists' interest in IC has emerged in (applied) linguistic theory and in language assessment. In theoretical developments in linguistics and applied linguistics, changing views of the concept of competence have had significant effects on the aims and practice of second language teaching and testing. These theoretical developments are discussed in the following section.

Explaining Competence

Competence and Performance

In linguistic theory, the term *competence* has been taken to mean an individual's knowledge underlying the production and interpretation of well-formed sentences in a language. The term was first used in this sense by Chomsky (1965), who used it to distinguish between a speaker's knowledge of

language in the abstract (competence) and the way in which that knowledge is realized in the production and interpretation of actual utterances (performance). Chomsky's idea of competence as knowledge of language apart from its use was criticized by Hymes (1972), who countered that not only does competence refer to the individual's knowledge of the forms and structures of language, but competence also extends to how the individual uses language in actual social situations. In effect, Hymes rejected Chomsky's dichotomy between competence and performance and argued that using language in social situations required as much knowledge and skill as knowledge of language as an idealized system—in Hymes's words, "[t]here are rules of use without which the rules of grammar are useless" (p. 278). Hymes then went on to specify the knowledge that speakers must have of at least four ways in which language is used in social situations: what is possible to do with language, what is feasible, what is appropriate, and what is actually done. This combination of ability and knowledge Hymes called *communicative competence*, which many people contrasted with Chomsky's theory, and the latter came to be known as *linguistic competence.*

Hymes's ideas were the basis for an applied linguistic theory of communicative competence put forward by Canale and Swain (1980) and for tests of *communicative language ability* theorized by Bachman (1990). These scholars tried to relate linguistic acts in social situations to an individual's underlying knowledge, and their views became very influential in second language teaching and testing. In both applied linguistic theory and language assessment, competence was recognized as a characteristic of a single individual. An individual's communicative competence was a complex construct composed of several component parts and it was something that differentiated one individual from others.

IC builds on the theories of competence that preceded it, but it is a very different notion from communicative competence and communicative language ability. He and Young (1998) wrote of two differences between IC and communicative competence. In one sense, IC simply adds further components to the four components of communicative competence. These were sketched by He and Young as linguistic and pragmatic resources that include, among others,

> a knowledge of rhetorical scripts, a knowledge of certain lexis and syntactic patterns specific to the practice, a knowledge of how turns are managed, a knowledge of topical organization, and a knowledge of the means for signaling boundaries between practices and transitions within the practice itself.
>
> (He & Young, 1998, p. 6)

Young (2008, p. 71) extended the list and wrote that IC includes the following seven resources that participants bring to interaction:

- Identity resources
    - *Participation framework*: the identities of all participants in an interaction, present or not, official or unofficial, ratified or unratified, and their footing or identities in the interaction
- Linguistic resources
    - *Register*: the features of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar that typify a practice
    - *Modes of meaning*: the ways in which participants construct interpersonal, experiential, and textual meanings in a practice
- Interactional resources
    - *Speech acts*: the selection of acts in a practice and their sequential organization
    - *Turn-taking*: how participants select the next speaker and how participants know when to end one turn and when to begin the next

> ◦ *Repair*: the ways in which participants respond to interactional trouble in a given practice
> ◦ *Boundaries*: the opening and closing acts of a practice that serve to distinguish a given practice from adjacent talk

IC involves knowledge and employment of these resources in social contexts. However, the fundamental difference between communicative competence and IC is that an individual's knowledge and employment of these resources is contingent on what other participants do; that is, IC is distributed across participants and varies in different interactional practices. And the most fundamental difference between interactional and communicative competence is that IC is not what a person *knows*, it is what a person *does* together with others.

Intersubjectivity

As mentioned earlier, Kramsch (1986) recognized that IC presupposes "a shared internal context or 'sphere of inter-subjectivity'" and this view is what most clearly distinguishes IC from previous theories of competence. What, then, is intersubjectivity? Developed originally as a philosophical theory in the phenomenology of Husserl (Beyer, 2007), intersubjectivity is the conscious attribution of intentional acts to others and involves putting oneself in the shoes of an interlocutor. Intersubjectivity was first inferred empirically from studies of infant development by Trevarthen (1977, 1979). In studies of interaction between preverbal infants and their mothers, Trevarthen noticed that at around two months of age, infants produced actions of body, hands, and face that were associated with the vocalizations of the mother. It seemed that, although each mother–infant pair was developing a different style of mutual activity, a general pattern of development in social behavior was common to all. Trevarthen (1977, p. 241) concluded:

> I believe a correct description of this behaviour, to capture its full complexity, must be in terms of mutual intentionality and sharing of mental state. Either partner may initiate a "display" or "act of expression" and both act to sustain a sharing and exchange of initiatives. Both partners express complex purposive impulses in a form that is infectious for the other.

One example of the coordination of actions that led Trevarthen to infer intersubjectivity is when the child's eyes follow the direction of the mother's gaze or her act of pointing. Another example is when, in ritualized games of routine, the mother pauses before an expected action and the infant performs that action, a projection of the mother's action that underlies the development of turn-taking in conversation.

Trevarthen's research on intersubjectivity formed the basis for Wells's (1979, 1981) studies of children's language development through interaction. Wells's central argument was that collaborative activity provides the natural context for first language development and that children learn through exploring their surroundings with others. Intersubjectivity is explained by Wells (1981) as follows:

> Linguistic interaction is a collaborative activity, and this applies just as much to the production and interpretation of individual utterances as it does to longer stretches of discourse. Any act of linguistic communication involves the establishment of a triangular relationship between the sender, the receiver, and the context of situation. The sender intends that, as a result of his communication, the receiver should come to attend to the same situation as himself and construe it in the same way. For the communication to be successful, therefore, it is necessary (a) that the receiver should come to attend to the situation as intended by the sender; (b) that the sender should know that the receiver is so doing; and (c) that the receiver should know that the sender

knows that this is the case. That is to say they need to establish *intersubjectivity* about the situation to which the communication refers.

(Wells, 1981, pp. 46–47, emphasis in the original)

Wells's theory has inspired much work on the development of IC, and he has argued forcefully that teacher–student conversation in classrooms should be a genuine dialogic co-construction of meaning. Some studies of how learners develop IC have taken intersubjectivity as evidence of IC. Other studies have focused, instead, on the learners' developing employment of identity, linguistic, and interactional resources. These studies are reviewed in the following section.

The Development of Interactional Competence

In 1999, as notions of IC were still being developed, Young (1999, pp. 119–120) wrote:

> At this point ... no empirical studies have been carried out to test the claims [of IC]. We have, as yet, very few detailed descriptions of the configuration of interactional resources that constitute the interactional architecture of a given practice. [...] And we await descriptive and pedagogical studies of how novices become expert-participants and the degree to which interactional competence in a given practice can be generalized to other practices.

A decade later the situation has improved, with a number of published studies describing the development of IC in instructional, study-abroad, and professional contexts. In all these studies, IC has been described in spoken interaction and their longitudinal focus has been on the developing pragmatic relationship between learners' employment of interactional and linguistic resources and social context. Several studies have focused on the way that IC is co-constructed by all participants in dyadic or multi-party interaction, but only one researcher has investigated the social, institutional, political, and historical circumstances that extend beyond the horizon of particular interactions. These studies are summarized below.

Two studies by Young and Miller (2004) and Yagi (2007) have explored how IC develops in recurrent dyadic interactions in which one participant is a second language learner and the other participant a native speaker. The discursive practice that Young and Miller reported they called *revision talk*, which formed part of writing conferences between a Vietnamese student of English as a second language (ESL) and his American tutor. The conferences took place once a week over a period of four weeks. Before each writing conference, the student had written a draft of an essay on a topic assigned by the tutor, and during revision talk the tutor and student identified problem areas in the student's writing, talked about ways to improve the writing, and revised the essay. Young and Miller identified a sequence of eight actions constituting revision talk, which were performed several times during each writing conference: (1) display of attention to the student's paper; (2) identification of a problem in the student's paper; (3) explanation and/or justification of the need for a revision; (4) direction to the student to produce a candidate revision; (5) production of the candidate revision; (6) direction to the student to write the revision; (7) writing the revision; and (8) evaluation of the written revision.

In the first writing conference, the student's participation in revision talk was peripheral, consisting of minimal utterances, almost all limited to *yeah*. Most of the tutor's turns were completed with falling and often final-falling intonation, which helped establish potential turn transition relevance places, but a change of speaker did not occur and the tutor extended her turn, producing almost all of the eight actions of revision talk. The student's minimal responses of *yeah* showed him to be complicit in producing the tutor's extended turn. Thus, student and tutor co-constructed the asymmetric

production of turns in this first occasion of revision talk. The student's peripheral participation was legitimated through the tutor's production of extended turns.

After four weeks, the participation framework of revision talk changed significantly. The student now performed many of the actions that were initially performed by the tutor. He identified the problem, he explained the need for a revision, he suggested a candidate revision, and he wrote the revision to his essay without being directed to do so by the tutor. Although the tutor's directive role in requiring that the student suggest a candidate revision and directing him to write it was never assumed by the student, it was hardly necessary for her to utter these directives because the student was ready to perform the required acts without direction. Not only did the quantity of the student's talk increase through the series of four conferences, but he also showed he had mastered the sequential structure of the practice by performing all acts except those that uniquely construct the role of tutor. It is in this sense that Young and Miller claimed that the student acquired IC in the practice of revision talk, which they noted was co-constructed by the tutor:

> It appears that the student is the one whose participation is most dramatically transformed, but the instructor is a co-learner, and her participation develops in a way that complements the student's learning. In fact, the effectiveness of the instructor is precisely in how she manages a division of participation that allows for growth on the part of the student.
>
> (Young & Miller, 2004, p. 533)

A second study of dyadic conversation between learners and native speakers in a single discursive practice is Yagi (2007). Yagi reported telephone calls by Japanese students of ESL in Hawai'i to various bookstores in the US inquiring whether the store had a particular title and asking about the store's opening hours. Students called bookstores ten times within approximately one hour. Although they received no feedback from Yagi or from their instructor, Yagi reports that by the end of the process, students came to communicate with bookstore staff more smoothly and effectively. The students experienced difficulty with certain unexpected phases of the interaction, including being put on hold while the store clerk searched for the requested title in the store's online database. One student employed a strategy to overcome interactional trouble by saying that he was Japanese and could not speak English very well. The sequence of opening actions in the telephone call also caused some difficulty. One previous study of telephone calls to a workplace (Bowles & Pallotti, 2004) had found that pre-request and initial inquiry actions often occur in place of the greeting found in openings of other kinds of calls, and Yagi found that some students consistently separated the greeting from the pre-request and initial inquiry. One student, however, performed both greeting and pre-request (e.g., "hello I'm looking for a book") or request (e.g., "hello I'm looking for a James Patterson's book") in the same turn, and Yagi reported that generally this student's interactions went smoothly. Yagi concluded that students are able to learn some aspects of IC through participation in a recurrent practice even without explicit feedback on their performance. He cautioned, however, that students' conscious attention to transcriptions of their interaction and guided reflection on their performance would be necessary to improve IC.

Second language learners' development of IC without overt study has also been observed in two reports of study abroad. The first, by Dings (2007), is the most extensive study to date of the development of IC. Dings reported on six 30-minute conversations in Spanish between Sophie, an American study-abroad student living in Granada, Spain and José, a native speaker of Spanish. The conversations were recorded at the beginning, middle, and end of two semesters of Sophie's sojourn in Granada. Dings reported on changes in Sophie's speaker selection, topic management, and alignment activity in her conversations with José over the year. In observing Sophie's developing employment of interactional resources, Dings focused attention on how Sophie selected either herself or

José as next speaker and how she initiated new conversational topics and managed transitions from one topic to another. Dings also developed a way to describe how Sophie and her interlocutor co-constructed the conversation by noticing alignment activity, defined as Sophie's assessment of her own and José's contributions and how Sophie collaborated with José in completing turns and extending topics. Dings summarized Sophie's development of IC as follows:

> Over the course of the year abroad Sophie showed some degree of development in all of the resources analyzed with the exception of topic initial elicitors. By the end of her stay abroad, she showed stronger skills in both speaker selection and alignment activity, and some skill in topic management in terms of topic transition markers.

> (Dings, 2007, p. 207)

In addition, Dings noticed development in ways in which Sophie collaboratively constructed the conversation with José:

> The most noticeable changes seen in co-construction while Sophie was holding the floor were the changing patterns in repair. [...] In general terms, José's role when holding the floor was relatively stable over the course of the year, while Sophie showed a growing involvement in elaborately co-constructing the interaction with José through her skillful deployment of alignment moves.

> (Dings, 2007, p. 215)

Another study that focused on learners' development of alignment in interactions with native speakers during study abroad is Ishida's (2009) report of an American student's conversations while studying abroad in Japan. The student, Fred, recorded eight 30-minute conversations once a month with Japanese people with whom he frequently interacted. The focus of Ishida's study was Fred's use of the Japanese particle ne [ね]. Ishida cited a number of studies of utterance-final ne that describe its wide range of interactional functions in Japanese including: an index of the speaker's epistemic and/or affective stance, the speaker's attempt to index a topic that the speaker believes to be known to the hearer, and an index of mutual alignment between speaker and hearer. Ishida reported, however, that Fred's development of IC was indexed by his use of ne in conversations with interlocutors. Initially, Ishida reported that Fred used ne only in turns that did not require "fine-tuning toward the previous speaker's turn" but in later conversations he "came to use [ne] as an immediate response to the previous speaker's turn and became more active in pursuing aligning responses through its use" (p. 382). In his later conversations, Fred used ne to index opinions that did not align with his interlocutor and his use of ne in assessments helped achieve mutual alignment with his interlocutors. By focusing on a learner's expanding interactional functions of a single linguistic form, Ishida's study showed how the learner developed overt attribution of intentional acts to others—intersubjectivity—and did so by means of expressions of alignment with what he perceived as the knowledge or stance of his interlocutor.

The studies reviewed thus far report the longitudinal development of IC of a single learner in dyadic interaction with a single native speaker.[1] Clearly, dyadic conversations like these allow comparisons between a learner's utterances in a recurrent discursive practice, but since learners do not generally interact with the same person over a long period of time, these nonetheless represent controlled experimental situations. A less controlled scenario is when learners interact with their teacher and classmates at school, and this is the context reported by Cekaite (2007) in her longitudinal study of one seven-year-old immigrant child's developing IC with her teacher and peers in a Swedish immersion language classroom. The child, Fusi, was a Kurdish girl from Iraq who spoke Kurdish and Arabic but whose Swedish was minimal at the beginning of the study.

Following Hall (1999) and Young and Miller (2004), Cekaite defined IC as participants' knowledge of the interactional architecture of a specific discursive practice, including knowledge of how to employ linguistic, pragmatic, and interactional resources in the construction of a discursive practice. Cekaite defined learning within Lave and Wenger's (1991) framework as evidenced by "novices' changing participation status and their move from peripheral to increasingly active participation in a given activity" (p. 46). The activities that Cekaite focused on were Fusi's topic initiation, her self-selection in multi-party turn-taking, and her construction of identity in the classroom.

Cekaite distinguished three phases in Fusi's development of IC over the school year. In the early phase, Fusi was mostly silent and participated only marginally in classroom activities. Her attempts to initiate a topic and to select herself as a conversational participant were nonverbal. Cekaite (2007, p. 49) reported that Fusi

> recurrently tried to get the teacher's and the children's attention by pretending to run away from the schoolyard or by pretending to cry in the classroom [...]. However, her peer group and her teachers rather quickly became bored with her staged escapes.

During the middle phase, Fusi's contributions were verbal but interactionally inappropriate. Cekaite reported that Fusi "frequently talked loudly, almost screaming, and her contributions were recurrently marked as unmitigated disagreements, which often resulted in conflict with the teachers or with the other children" (p. 50). In response, her teacher either ignored or explicitly disciplined her while her peers continued to self-select in conversations with the teacher. Cekaite commented that such responses to Fusi's attempts to participate provided her with explicit or implicit socialization to the norms of classroom conversation. In the final stage of observation, Fusi began to participate as a competent member of the classroom community. Cekaite reported that Fusi "mastered a more elaborate Swedish repertoire and developed interactional skills allowing her to participate in spontaneously evolving whole-group conversational activities, which in turn shaped interactional learning affordances" (p. 58). Her teachers paid attention to her initiatives and engaged in conversational exchanged with her. Thus, through participation in recurrent classroom discursive practices but with little explicit instruction in the norms of interaction, Fusi learned how classroom interaction was designed and how to participate effectively in it.

Cekaite's study is a valuable report of one child's development in the use of linguistic and interactional resources in the pragmatics of spoken interaction. Fusi's IC is also co-constructed by the reactions of her teachers and peers to her contributions, a development that eventually positioned her as a competent member of the classroom community. However, one feature of IC has only been hinted at by Cekaite and by authors of the other studies reviewed so far. A full understanding of IC requires an investigation of social, institutional, political, and historical circumstances that extend beyond the horizon of particular interactions. This wider context of interaction has been the focus of two studies by Nguyen (2006, 2008) of the development of IC in the counseling performed by two inexperienced pharmacists with patients during the course of the pharmacists' internships.

Nguyen's studies did not specifically address second language learning because her two subjects were both highly fluent English speakers. Nonetheless, their development of IC is relevant because of the clear relationship between the practice in which pharmacists and patients participated and the wider social order. US federal law and many states mandate that pharmacists provide instructions to patients about the medication they receive, and instruction in patient consultation is part of the curricula of many Schools of Pharmacy. Apart from these legislative mandates, the practice of patient consultation in a pharmacy is a site where a social hierarchy is constructed, in which the prescribing doctor occupies the highest rank, the patient the lowest, and the pharmacist an intermediary role between them. The two examples of interactions that I have excerpted from Nguyen's studies show clearly how the novice pharmacists negotiated their position in the hierarchy.

Nguyen (2006) compared two patient consultations performed by Jim, an advanced student of pharmacy employed as an intern at a community pharmacy. Over a period of three weeks, Jim demonstrated development of his participation status in patient consultations from *novice expert* to *experienced expert*. Nguyen (2006) explained the different statuses by citing Benner's (1984) work on the construction of expertise in health care practice:

> Unlike the novice expert, the experienced expert is someone who not only has access to professional knowledge, but also "no longer relies on analytic principles (rules, guidelines, maxims)", and "has an intuitive grasp of each situation and zeroes in on the accurate region of the problem without wasteful consideration of a large range of alternative diagnoses and solutions."
>
> (Nguyen, 2006, p. 148)

In an early patient consultation, Jim displayed his expert knowledge about administration and side effects of a medication using technical vocabulary despite the patient's apparent lack of interest; in doing so, Jim constructed an identity for himself that Nguyen called novice expert. In contrast, after working in the community pharmacy for three weeks and having participated in many patient consultations, Jim displayed an alignment with the patient's stance that was absent three weeks earlier. Nguyen (2006) went on to show how during his internship Jim developed other skills in patient consultations, including his responses to patients' challenges, the development of a shared perspective with his patients toward medication and toward the technical language provided in the patient information slips that are provided with every prescription. As his participation status as novice expert developed, Jim was able to utilize interactional and verbal resources more skillfully, both in displaying his expertise and in maintaining a stance of alignment with his patients—both of which are, according to Nguyen, important attributes of an experienced expert.

In her second study, Nguyen's (2008) focused on the development of IC in patient consultations involving another pharmacy intern, Mai, who negotiated her own role in the doctor–pharmacist–patient hierarchy. A template of interaction in patient consultation includes two pharmacist's actions that form part of a sequence of advice giving. The pharmacist refers to the doctor's prescription, including how frequently the medication should be taken and for how long, and the method by which it should be administered. The pharmacist also provides his/her own advice to the patient without referring to the doctor's prescription. These two actions are performed by experienced pharmacists in a fixed sequence: the doctor's instructions are given first, followed if necessary by an elaboration by the pharmacist. By referring to the doctor's instructions (in many cases indexing printed instructions by gesture and by referring to the doctor by name or simply as "they") the pharmacist creates a participation status for the doctor as author of the words that the pharmacist utters. The doctor's participation status is also principal, whose position is established by the words uttered and creates a context for the instructions that the pharmacist gives.

This sequence of actions in patient consultations appears to be crucial in establishing the pharmacist's role as intermediary between the prescribing doctor and the patient and, when the sequence is violated, interactional trouble results. In patient consultations performed early in her internship, Mai did not precede her own advice by reference to the doctor's prescription. In this case, Nguyen (2008) reported, "there were several instances of interactional trouble which were evident in the patient's lack of immediate receipt of the pharmacist's advice" (p. 536). Perhaps as a result of her experience of interactional trouble, over time Mai changed toward a less problematic sequence, specifically invoking the doctor as principal and author before giving her own advice.

The seven studies of the development of IC reported here show how the theoretical construct of IC can provide a new perspective on the second language learning process. Some but not all of the four aspects of IC can be seen in all these studies. First, all have been studies of spoken

interaction and many have adopted the close analyses of spoken discourse that originate in conversation analysis. The studies by Young and Miller (2004) and by Nguyen (2006, 2008) have also included analyses of nonverbal communication including gesture, gaze, and body positioning. Second, the pragmatic relationships between forms of talk employed by learners and the cultural expectations of their interlocutors have been reported by Yagi (2007), Cekaite (2007), and Nguyen (2008), and these authors have remarked on how changes in learners' pragmatic competence has resulted in less problematic interactions. Third, the studies by Dings (2007), Ishida (2009), and Nguyen (2006) have shown how learners develop alignment with the knowledge or stance of their interlocutors, thus creating intersubjectivity—a shared mental context with their interactional partners. Dings (2007) reported that Sophie showed intersubjectivity by means of expressions of assessment of José's utterances, by collaboratively managing topics, and my managing smooth transitions from one topic to another; Ishida (2009) reported that Fred achieved alignment with his interlocutors through grammatical means; and Nguyen (2006) reported that Jim did so with his patients by means of changing stance from novice expert to experienced expert. Finally, the construction of an identity that persists beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of a single interaction was reported by Cekaite (2007) and Nguyen (2008). Cekaite reported that after a considerable trajectory of interactional struggle, Fusi learned to perform as a socially competent student in the classroom who had learned to self-select and to participate in whole-group activities in accordance with the cultural norms of the classroom. Nguyen's comparison of Mai's identity construction in patient consultations also showed how the novice pharmacist changed the selection and sequence of activities in the patient consultations from a context in which the participation of the prescribing physician was not invoked to one in which she constructed the physician as principal and author of the instructions that she gave to the patient.

The authors of these studies have provided detailed descriptions of learners' development of IC, but they have provided little evidence of how the changes in IC occurred. One exception is Cekaite's description of how Fusi's teachers and classmates reacted to Fusi's violation of the norms of classroom participation. Ishida also speculated that the learners in her study may have been influenced by the booksellers' reactions to learners' actions in their first few telephone calls. In other words, no study so far has been designed to address the question of how to *teach* IC. Some scholars have, however, theorized how IC may be taught, and their work is briefly reviewed in the next section.

The Role of Instruction

Wong (2000) was among the first applied linguists to argue that second language learners can benefit from study of transcriptions of recorded naturally occurring conversations in order to learn how participants construct, reconstruct, and orient to social actions. Wong's call for attention to transcriptions of live interaction was echoed by Crandall and Basturkmen (2004) and Yagi (2007). Hall (1999) also maintained that second language learners can attain IC in part by the systematic study of discursive practices outside the classroom, a study that she termed "the prosaics of interaction." Hall explained what she meant as follows:

> By standing outside of interactive practices that are of significance to the group(s) whose language is being learned, and analyzing the conventional ways that verbal resources get used, the movement that occurs between their conventional meanings and their individual uses, and the consequences that are engendered by the various uses, we can develop a far greater understanding both of ourselves and of those in whose practices we aspire to become participants.
>
> (Hall, 1999, p. 144)

The process of teaching would then involve two moments. In the first, learners are guided through conscious, systematic study of the practice, in which they mindfully abstract, reflect upon, and speculate about the sociocultural context of the practice and the verbal, interactional, and nonverbal resources that participants employ in the practice. In the second moment, learners are guided through participation in the practice by more experienced participants. These two pedagogical moments, Hall argues, facilitate the development of IC in the second language.

In study abroad contexts, however, Dings (2007) and Ishida (2009) have both reported that learners sojourning in the community where the second language is used in everyday interactions have in fact developed aspects of IC, specifically the ability to take a point of view or stance of an interlocutor. If this is so, is it not enough to learn IC simply by extended interaction in the second language community? Relevant research on the effect of study abroad on the development of pragmatic competence was reviewed by Kasper and Rose (2002), who concluded that "[f]or developing pragmatic ability, spending time in the target community is no panacea, length of residence is not a reliable predictor, and L2 classrooms can be a productive social context" (p. 230). In other words, exposure alone to discursive practice in a second language community is not an efficient instructional strategy, no matter how long or how intense the exposure.

Young (2009) extended Kasper and Rose's conclusion about the development of pragmatic competence to IC and argued that there is considerable support for a pedagogy of conscious and systematic study of interaction in the work of the Soviet psychologist Gal'perin and his theory of systemic–theoretical instruction also known as concept-based instruction (Arievitch & Stetsenko, 2000; Gal'perin, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c; Haenen, 2001). Instruction, in Gal'perin's view, is the provision of efficient cultural psychological tools to learners so that they may solve problems in a specific domain. Comparing the kinds of cultural mediation available to learners in different types of instruction, Gal'perin concluded that the most efficient tool for learners is the provision of a general procedure that learners can use to solve any specific problem in a given instructional domain. For Gal'perin, the initial step in the procedure is construction of a "schema for a complete orienting basis for an action" (Gal'perin, 1989b, p. 70), which is in effect a theory of the domain of instruction. The new practice to be learned is first brought to the learner's attention, not in the small stages that characterize behaviorist instruction, but as a meaningful whole from the very beginning of instruction. Arievitch and Stetsenko (2000, p. 77) provided a general description of the procedure as follows: In concept-based instruction,

> students acquire a general method to construct a concrete orientation basis to solve any specific problem in a given subject domain. Such a general method involves a theoretical analysis of objects, phenomena, or events in various subject domains. The main feature of the analysis is that it reveals the "genesis" and the general structure of objects or phenomena (the general make-up of things). In such analysis, students learn to distinguish essential characteristics of different objects and phenomena, to form theoretical concepts on this basis, and use them as cognitive tools in further problem solving.

At the time of writing, there are very few applications of concept-based instruction to second language learning and those reported so far have focused on the acquisition of second language grammar (Negueruela, 2003; Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006). Despite what many have argued is an important pedagogy, no applications of concept-based instruction to the development of IC have been reported. In contrast, the field of language testing has seen an extensive discussion of how to assess IC, arising largely from work on performance testing and the realization that an individual score on a language test results from an interaction between the individual's ability and the context in which ability is measured. Recent research on interactional constructs in language testing is the topic of the next section.

Interactional Constructs in Language Testing

How has the concept of IC influenced the design of language tests and the interpretation tests results? The co-construction of IC by all participants in an interaction creates a challenge for assessment because, as Chalhoub-Deville and Deville (2005, p. 826) explain:

> Evaluating test-takers' performance according to this model offers a conundrum. Generally speaking, we administer tests to, assign scores to, and make decisions about individuals for purposes such as selection, placement, assignment of grades/marks, and the like. If we view language as co-constructed, how can we disentangle an individual's contribution to a communicative exchange in order to provide a score or assess a candidate's merit for a potential position?

In other words, if IC is the construct underlying test design, how can candidates' test performance be interpreted?

The general shape of the relationship between test performance and the construct underlying a test was laid out by Messick (1989, 1996) and Chapelle (1998). Chapelle distinguished among three perspectives on construct definition: a construct may be defined as a *trait*, as a *behavior*, or as *some combination of trait and behavior*. In a trait definition of a construct, consistent performance of a person on a test is related in a principled way to the person's knowledge and speech production processes. That is to say, a person's consistent performance on a test is taken to index a fairly stable configuration of knowledge and skills that the person carries around with them—and which that person can apply in all contexts. In contrast, in a definition of a construct as a behavior, the consistent performance of a person on a test is related in a principled way to the context in which the behavior is observed. That is to say, test performance is assumed to say something about a person's performance on a specific task or in a specific context, but *not* on other tasks or in other contexts—unless these can be shown to be related to the task or context that was tested.

Clearly, neither definition of a construct as trait or behavior is satisfactory for tests of IC because it includes *both* knowledge *and* the employment of that knowledge in different contexts of use. For this reason, it is desirable to consider the third of Messick's and Chapelle's definitions of a construct, which they refer to as the interactionalist definition. In an interactionalist validation of a test, a person's performance on a test is taken to indicate an underlying trait characteristic of that person and, at the same time, the performance is also taken to indicate the influence of the context in which the performance occurs. The interactionalist definition is, in other words, a way to infer from test performance something about *both* a practice-specific behavior *and* a practice-independent, person-specific trait. Moreover, the interactionalist definition of a construct refers not only to the trait and the context but also to some theory of how the two interact.

However, if interactionalist and behaviorist approaches to construct definition are to allow test users to generalize from performance in one context to another—that is, from the context of the performance elicited in the test to other non-test contexts—then what is needed is a theory that relates one context to another in a principled way. The question of generalizability of test results is a question of whether and how knowledge and ability employed by a person in one context of use can be redeployed in another.

If a person's knowledge is displayed in a participation framework in a certain context, then, because that framework has an architecture, elements of that architecture can be found, albeit in different configurations, in different contexts. What is needed is, as McNamara (1997) realized, a "close analysis of naturally occurring discourse and social interaction [to] reveal the standards that apply in reality in particular settings" (p. 457). Such an analysis of discourse and social interaction was the aim of Young's (2009) analysis of discursive practice. The architecture of any particular discursive

practice is characterized by four features. First, analysis of language in social interaction is concerned with language used in specific discursive practices rather than with language ability independent of context. Second, it is characterized by attention to the co-construction of discursive practices by *all* participants involved rather than a narrow focus on a single individual. Third, as Young (2008) specified, analysis of social interaction identifies the set of seven identity, linguistic, and interactional resources that participants employ in specific ways in order to co-construct a discursive practice. And fourth, the problem of generalizability is resolved by identifying the particular configuration of resources that participants employ in a particular practice and, then, comparing the configuration of resources in that practice with others in order to discover what resources are local to that practice and to what extent the practice shares resources and a configuration with other practices.

This framework for understanding the construct of IC underlying a person's performance on a test is the interactionalist definition in Messick's (1989, 1996) and Chapelle's (1998) terms. The construct is local in the sense that it indicates the influence of the context in which the test performance was elicited. In addition, because the context involves other participants in addition to the candidate (interlocutors in an oral test, the designer of the test, the item writers, an oral examiner, members of an examination board, and others), the performance of a candidate must be understood as co-constructed and the contributions of others must be considered—those others "whose behavior and interpretation shape the perceived significance of the candidate's efforts but are themselves removed from focus" (McNamara, 1997, p. 459).

However, the redeployment of resources from one discursive practice to another—in other words the generalizability of an individual candidate's test performance—is within the scope of an analysis of context inspired by Practice Theory. The trait that an interactionalist theory of the construct considers is the configuration of identity, linguistic, and interactional resources employed in a test. But that does not mean that every discursive practice is *sui generis*. That configuration must then be compared with the configuration of resources employed in other contexts.

One clear example of portability of resources is provided by Young's (2003) analysis of the resources employed by international teaching assistants (ITAs) in office-hour conversations with students. Young compared an office-hour conversation conducted by an ITA in the Math Department at an American university with an office hour conducted by an ITA in the Italian Department. By comparing the resources employed in the two office-hour conversations, Young concluded that there were enough similarities to describe a genre of office-hour conversation. This genre is characterized by: a problem-statement/resolution script; an opening sequence that moves quickly to a statement of the problem; lexicogrammatical choices by both participants that mutually construct the ITA as an expert and the student as a novice; and a turn-taking system in which the ITA may take a turn at any time and may allocate the next turn to the student and may deny the floor to the student by means of overlapping speech. However, interactional differences in office-hour interactions in the two disciplines were apparent in the topics that were chosen and in the way that topics were sequenced. Discipline-specific modes of reasoning were instantiated in these office hours by the way that topics arose, persisted, and changed in conversation and by the semantic relations between adjacent topics. Young concluded that assessment of ITAs' IC in office hours was similar enough across disciplines to justify discipline-independent assessment.

Other well-known comparisons of the interactional resources in different practices are the studies of oral second-language proficiency interviews collected by Young and He (1998) and reviewed by Johnson (2001), Lazaraton (2002), and Young (2002). These studies compared the interactional resources employed by participants in mundane conversations with those required for participation in oral proficiency assessments. The differences in the interactional architectures of the two practices are so apparent that Johnson titled her analysis of oral proficiency interviews: *The art of non-conversation*. He and Young (1998) concluded that the resources employed by an examiner and a

candidate in the assessment practice of an oral proficiency interview are very different from those employed by participants in conversations between native and nonnative speakers. Prior to the analyses that Young and He published, the similarity between interviews and conversations was something that was taken for granted because few researchers had made any systematic comparisons between the two practices. However, the results of the comparisons carried out on practices in several different languages revealed that the interactional architecture of interviews is very different from the interactional architecture of ordinary conversation. Interviews, that is, are not authentic tests of conversation, and generalization from a person's performance in a testing context to their performance in a non-testing context is problematic.

In conclusion, it can be seen that testing IC in a second language requires much greater analysis of the discursive architecture of language testing practices and systematic comparison with practices outside the testing room. This does not mean that generalization from test performance to non-test contexts is invalid. It does mean, however, that testers and applied linguists need to do much more work on the context of testing to elucidate the architecture of practices which language learners perform. As Anastasi (1986) stressed: "When selecting or developing tests and when interpreting scores, consider context. I shall stop right there, because those are the words, more than any others, that I want to leave with you: *consider context*" (p. 484, emphasis in original).

Future Directions for the Study of Interactional Competence

The following four aspects of IC have been cited in this review:

1. IC has been studied in spoken interaction, although nonverbal aspects of spoken interaction are seen as important.
2. The pragmatics of interaction—the relationships between the forms of talk chosen by participants and the social contexts in which they are used—are fundamental to IC.
3. IC is the construction of a shared mental context through the collaboration of all interactional partners.
4. The context of an interaction includes the social, institutional, political, and historical circumstances that extend beyond the horizon of a single interaction.

Learners' development in several of these four aspects has been reported in longitudinal studies in which learners' contributions to discursive practices have been compared over time. There is evidence from study abroad that IC does develop over time as a result of extended interaction by learners in a second language culture, but development may be slow and there is further evidence that simple exposure is not an effective learning strategy. Several authors have proposed that conscious systematic study by learners of the details of interaction in specific discursive practices may benefit development of IC, but we await empirical studies to test that claim.

In the assessment of IC, several authors have claimed that a close analysis needs to be made of the identity, linguistic, and interactional resources employed by participants in an assessment practice. This interactional architecture of the test may then be compared with discursive practices outside the testing room in which the learner wishes to participate. If the configuration of resources in the two practices is similar, then an argument can be made to support the generalization of an individual's test result because the testee can redeploy resources used in one practice to another. Is this truly a test of IC, however? Lee (2006) has argued that there is a tension between two interpretations of IC, one that admits stable and recognizable constructs of interaction, which can be transformed into language assessment and language learning objectives, and another that recognizes the contingency and variation of interactional organization. Lee (2006, p. 354) writes that this is precarious because

it points to the discursive practice of interaction that is locally contingent and situationally specific while at the same time it attempts to create stable and unifying categories with which to compare language practices across contexts and even to document change.

Future work in the learning, teaching, and assessment of IC may resolve this tension.

Note

1. The sole exception is Ishida's (2009) study of Fred, in which several of Fred's eight conversations were with two people, and in one conversation one interlocutor was another American student.

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