THE MANY FACES OF COMPETENCE: REFLECTIONS ON INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN THE POST-MODERN ERA

Melissa Steyn

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that post-modernism challenges the way in which intercultural communication competence has traditionally been conceptualized. The very framing of the notion as "competence" reveals its historical contingency and complicity with a particular interest group. Some of the assumptions which underpin the "received" versions of competence are examined, and are related to post-modern concerns of the nature of knowledge and truth, culture and personhood. In the course of the analysis, reference is made to the literature on competence, and suggestions are made for ways in which competence can fruitfully be explored that are more in keeping with the spirit of post-modernism.

Melissa Steyn of the Professional Communication Unit of UCT is currently completing her Masters Degree in Intercultural Communication at Arizona State University. This article is based on a paper presented at the Western States Communication Association Conference in February 1996 at Pasadena.

Communication competence was first studied within the field of interpersonal communication. As the field of intercultural communication developed, the application and extension of findings from studies in interpersonal communication competence seemed an obvious source for a theoretical framework to conceptualize what facilitates interactions between people of different cultural backgrounds. In fact, the exact relationship between interpersonal competence as conceptualized within the traditional competence literature and

intercultural competence remains a moot issue. Ruben (1989:235) poses the question as follows: "Is interpersonal communication competence a special case of cross-cultural communication competence or the other way around?". Koester, Wiseman & Sanders (1993) contrast two positions on this issue. The first is the approach adopted by Spitzberg (1989), who advocates the development of a theory of competence formulated within interpersonal studies, which can then be applied to intercultural settings. The second position is represented by the work of scholars like Martin & Hammer (1989), who begin with the unique characteristics of the intercultural setting.

This question of the exact salience of culture in conceptualizing intercultural communication competence opens a deeper issue which scholars of intercultural communication now face, namely, how to position themselves in relation to the fundamental challenges posed by post-modernism. The post-modern approach is underpinned by an acceptance of the implications of reality as socially constructed (Anderson 1990), and calls for a repositioning towards the ways in which knowledge and truth, culture, and personhood are understood. These shifts inevitably impact upon the way in which intercultural competence will be approached in research and theory. This paper proposes to examine some of the tenets of post-modernism, and to explore some of the implications of these tenets for intercultural communication competence research.

THE POST-MODERN BREAK AND PROBLEMATIZING COMPETENCE

Before relating conceptions of intercultural competence to post-modern debates, I would like to set out some basic tenets of post-modernism. The exact meaning of the term is in some dispute (Harvey, 1990). In this paper I follow Lather (1991:4) in using the term somewhat interchangeably with post-structuralism and other contemporary discourse theory; a "conjunction of contradictory ideas and practices" (1991:5) which produces "an awareness of complexity, contingency and fragility of historical forms and events" (1991:6).

Proponents of the post-modernist worldview argue that post-modernism is a historical fact, brought about largely by the nature of modern technology. They argue that there has been a break with the western Enlightenment faith in rationality and science, the belief in a teleological account of history, and the humanist conception of an autonomous, potentially fully-conscious individual. The post-modern era is marked by an acute awareness of the relationship between knowledge and power, and the way in which language inevitably draws one into power relationships. This has resulted in a questioning of totalizing, universalizing theory. Moreover this new world view is situated within a post-imperialist world, where colonial Others have emerged as subjects with voices in their own right, a world view in which difference cannot be "consumed" (Denzin & Lincoln 1994: 566).

If we now turn our attention to the concept of competence, we can contextualize the notion as it has been passed down to us. Here the issue is in what ways even framing the issue of "good" communication in terms of "competence" carries assumptions that indicate historical contingency, and complicity with a particular interest group. This involves shifting our focus from the question "What is intercultural competence?" to "Why does this question get asked in the first place?" It is to ask how the question gets said, rather than to focus on what it actually asks (Fergusen 1993). Anderson suggests that one should look at the frame, not the picture (Anderson, 1990:153). Applying this logic to the question of intercultural competence, it is important to note that the question arose from the need to train representatives from the American Peace Corps and Multinational companies for duty on overseas missions. Nakayama and Martin (1993:4) show that, historically, intercultural communication has centered white Americans and that "most cross-cultural training programs are designed to facilitate European American communication with "others". This indicates that the concept of intercultural competence is entangled in a complex of white, Western, and capitalist, hegemonic agendas. Generally, the two main dimensions of competence are taken as appropriateness and effectiveness (Spitzberg 1989). One could gainfully ask, "Appropriate to what ends?" "Effective in whose eyes?" Indeed, that intercultural communication which brings about desirable outcomes should be encapsulated by the single notion of competence reveals its investment in Western discourse of task, performance and instrumentality. After all, competence is something one strives for in order to get more done, to effect more change. It is something that improves with conscious practice, thus allowing greater control within a situation. What is significant here is that this particular way of framing the issue has won sway over other possible formulations (See Cui & Van den Berg 1991; Hegde 1994; Taylor 1994).

It is not difficult to see that this orientation would not fit comfortably with other worldviews. Miyahara (1994) argues that in Japanese society healthy communication is seen to arise from qualities that gradually grow in a person through a lifetime of interaction. Competence by this conceptualization is not something one achieves through conscious effort. Moreover, many other cultures of the world, where the emphasis is less on task, and more on relationship and community (see Asante 1987; Hegde 1994; Yum 1994,) could well valorize harmonious intercultural communication rather than competent communication. Similarly, this conception may not accurately reflect women's experience of communication. Following the logic Fergusen uses in her book, The Man Question, one could ask, "Why is successful communication between cultures considered essentially problematic in the first place, as that which is in need of explanation? One could argue that in the masculine conception of personhood "separateness" is valor-

ized. Perhaps a gynocentric view of competence would assume human connectedness, and would valorize caring intercultural communication. I do not wish to pursue the above argument, the purpose is merely to show that the valorization of the very concept of competence is itself historical and contingent. It comes across as a stable and "natural" construct only because it occurs within the reified discourse of the dominant western, male group. This interest group has "disciplined" (in the Foucaultian sense) the field, and other discourses about desirable intercultural communication have become subjugated. An important part of a postmodern approach to intercultural competence would be to give voice to those alternative discourses.

The following sections of my paper explore some of the assumptions which underpin the "received" versions of competence, and relate them to postmodern concerns in three key areas: questions of the nature of knowledge and truth, the nature of culture, and of personhood, or subjectivity. In the course of the discussion I will try to point out implications for the conceptualization of competence. I will mention various researchers whose work seems to be moving in directions that are consistent with some of the trends suggested by the discussion.

QUESTIONS OF KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH

The primary thrust of research in competence has been to identify the attributes of knowledge, attitude, and behavior that characterize effective intercultural communicators. Such attributes are considered to be predictors of success in intercultural interactions. In his early studies which laid the ground for much of the work which was to follow, Ruben (1976) operationalized competence as seven behavioral components: display of respect, interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, empathy, role behavior, interaction management, and tolerance for ambiguity. Hammer, Gudykunst and Wiseman (1978) found three behavioral attributes to be related to intercultural success, namely: the ability to deal with psychological stress, the ability to communicate effectively, and the ability to establish interpersonal relationships.

Certain scholars have focused on cognitive dimensions of competence. Detweiler (1980), for example, has examined the relationship between category width and intercultural competence, whereas Wiseman and Abe (1986) have investigated the role of cognitive complexity and perceptions in competence. Triandis (1973), by contrast, has emphasized the role of knowledge of the other culture in intercultural exchanges, maintaining that intercultural competence requires isomorphic attribution -- the ability to analyze and anticipate the other person's behavior through an understanding of his or her cultural assumptions.

Several scholars point out the importance of the affective dimension of intercultural competence. Examples are

the studies by Stephan and Stephan (1992) who examined the causal link between anxiety and intercultural success, and by Redmond and Bunyi (1993) who considered the relationship between competence and both the amount of stress, and the handling of stress. Wiseman, Hammer and Nishida (1989) incorporate all three dimensions (cognitive, affective and cognitive) in their operationalization of competence, and examine cross-cultural attitude as one of their variables. The theoretical formulation that has achieved widespread acceptance is that of Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), which sees competence as a function of motivation, knowledge and skills.

It is clear that the researchers cited above are seeking a set of universal qualities, skills or attributes that would characterize competence and would be true for all people, and probably at all times. Their faith in these constructs rests on the fact that they have been discovered through the process of rational research. It is not difficult to see that this aim fits in squarely with the "Enlightenment project" of progress. (Harvey, 1990). Indeed, the underlying raison d'être of much Communication studies could be seen to be the advancement of the project of modernity by working towards the "perfection" of human communication, towards a time when "all sources of irresolvable conflicts or contradictions will disappear and . . . human actions [will be] in conformity with our highest and most emancipatory potentials" (Flax 1992: 449). Fergusen (1993) links both positivism and interpretivism to modernity. The knowledge produced by this rational enterprise would be what Jane Flax calls "innocent knowledge," that is, truth that "can tell us how to act in the world in ways that benefit or are for the (at least ultimate) good of all" (Flax 1992:447), free from the taint of power. As researchers, the knowledge grounded on the authority of reason would be neutral, and would not distort either the investigator or the investigated. This is clearly a fallacy, a conception of knowledge which masks the roles such things as desire (especially for power), fantasy, and historicity play in the construction of knowledge.

The first implication of this post-modern analysis is that we have to accept our constructions of competence as constructions and we have to take responsibility for their consequences. These "scientific truths" are artifacts, the effects of discourse rather than "immediate, indubitable features of mental life." Truth is always contextual. There can be no set of attributes that qualify as "true competence" transcendent of a particular discourse. Moreover, any conception of competence will be simultaneously enabling and limiting, allowing one only to make statements that conform with the rules of the particular discourse. This makes the attempt to construct a single, unified conception of competence highly suspicious. It can only be achieved through the subjugation of other conceptions of competence both within the society from which it emanates, as well as those of other societies. Anderson (1990) points out that

the belief that truth is on one's side is the characteristic of the fundamentalist, a position antithetical to post-modern sensibility.

In other words, a conception of competence that would be able to straddle the discourses of many different cultures could never be based on the truth constructions of the discourse emanating from a single culture, and the "scientific method" in no way absolves the researcher from this stricture. It follows that any conceptions of intercultural competence would have to be grounded in rules which emanate from several discourses. Flax (1992:452) comments, "Prior agreement on rules, not the power of objective truth, makes conflict resolution possible." By this argument, competence thus becomes the ability to recognize, and to agree on using, dialogic structures which accommodate the cultural discourses of individual participants, along the lines of third culture building (See Casmir & Asuncion-Lande, 1990). Moreover, because "discourses are local, heterogeneous, and often incommensurable," it may be that some interacting cultures have few rules of discourse to agree upon, whereas for other cultures, there may be considerable overlap. The attempt to find essentialist categories that has characterized western conceptions of competence gives way to an analysis of why a particular set of discursive practices is "preferable for certain pragmatic purposes" (Flax 1992:458) within more specific contexts. There can, however, be no historical, transcendental standpoint from which to judge the truth of a theory constructed in this way.

The second major implication of the underlying assumptions of knowledge and truth, adumbrated above is that western theorists need to take responsibility for the drive to power that has provided much of the momentum of western knowledge. In seeking to name "universal" attributes of competence, we have in effect been attempting to define competence for all cultures. Post-colonial writers point out that this act of unilateral definition denies difference and independent character or worth. The result is a bifurcation of the consciousness of the oppressed (see hooks, 1994; Trinh, 1991). Flax (1992:459) comments: " . . . [C]onstituting acts of exclusion or repression can only become evident when the power relations which enable the construction of knowledge claims are explicitly addressed." Post-modernism welcomes the rise of previously decentered people, "the eccentrics"(Lather 1991:31). Harvey (1990:47) regards this concern with 'otherness' as the most liberating and appealing aspect of post-modernism. One could add that this is true particularly of the post-structural branch of contemporary theory. Some recent scholarship has indeed begun to explore competence taking some of these "other" consciousnesses as starting point (Hegde 1993; Miyahara 1993; Yum 1993).

Although not couched in these exact terms, there has, of course, been some awareness in the literature on intercultural communication competence of

aspects of the issues raised above. For example, scholars have debated that some components of competence seem to be culture-general, and some culture-specific (Abe & Wiseman 1983). Koester et al (1993:12) comment: "The crux of the choice on this presupposition is a scholar's judgment about whether intercultural competence can theoretically, conceptually, or even practically be identified without reference to the specifics of interaction rules within a particular culture". The post-modern reply would be an unequivocal, "No." Moreover, the quest for culture-general components is exactly the cause for unease from a post-modern perspective. Martin (1993:18) points out that the development of theories that are culture-specific to the middle-class, college-educated Euro-American community, has "inhibited progress toward a general theory of competence because the findings and conclusions from these theories were sometimes inappropriately used to conduct scientific tests whose results were then extrapolated to inferring the universality of general theories". The consequence is that, "It is not clear to what degree the models representing Euro-American communicative competence are applicable to other cultures" . She continues by noting that the Western bias has led to a reliance on the positivistic research paradigm. The challenge, then, is to study emic perspectives that "represent communities' realities" and "the intersubjectivity of the communicators" with the eventual goal of "an integrated theory of communicative competence - one that is emically appropriate to any one particular context, and that provides a framework allowing for meaningful comparisons" (1993:28). This would require research along the lines of the tradition of cultural communication studies and ethnography of communication as found in the work of scholars like Hymes, Carbaugh, and Philipsen. Collier (1989:289) argues in favor of such an approach. She maintains that, "Culture-general theoretical frameworks or processes can be posited only after representational and cultural validity have been demonstrated. Constructs and behaviors which are posited to be generalizable across culture groups should be based upon a research perspective which ensures representational validity". Her own work, which defines intercultural competence as the mutual confirmation of the interactants' cultural identities according to rule structures that differ for various ethnic groups, is cited by Martin (1993) as a promising culture-specific approach. Related work that Martin sees extending beyond the Eurocentric framework, is that of Hecht and various associates (See, for example, Hecht & Ribeau, 1984; Hecht, Ribeau, & Alberts, 1989). Hecht explores Afro-American, Europe-American and Mexican American perspectives. Rather than focusing on competence per se, the emphasis is on interactions which are sometimes problematic. The results from these studies "confirm the speculation that previously established models of interpersonal competence may not be generalizable beyond the Euro-American community" (Martin 1993:26). Nishida's (1985) research

supports this conclusion. This author comments that skills found to predict effectiveness in Western research may not be applicable to people whose cultural backgrounds are very different from those of Westemers, and calls for work which explores individual cultures' communication patterns. Postmodemism (particularly poststructuralism) requires that we move beyond mere interpretivism, however, and confront questions of power more directly, as well as explore the implications of the social construction of reality more fully, acknowledging belief as belief, and not as fact. Given the present power structures, the western story of competence is likely to retain some prominence, even though relativized, as one against which others react, and which they use to make their own conceptions more defined.

Moreover, although it may be tempting to seek the goal of a meta-theory that would encompass various first-order conceptions of competence, the postmodem sensibility exhibits a profound skepticism towards any attempt to formulate a meta-narrative that would claim to operate on a higher level of abstraction, and which would be "capable of situating, characterizing and evaluating all other discourses but not itself to be infected by the historicity and contingency which render first-order discourses potentially distorted and in need of legitimation." (Frazer & Nicholson 1990:22). Frazer and Nicholson quote Lyotard in saying that legitimation in the post-modern era becomes plural, local, and immanent. The implication for intercultural competence is that we probably should not regard our task as constructing a large, overarching theory, a "grand narrative" which through "lack of fit" may alienate and disconfirm less dominant cultures. Rather, we need to build a more integrated view through allowing conceptions from individual contexts where meaning is produced, to jointly form a comprehensive pattern. The composite meaning that emerges from the co-existence of all these views, should be seen as a more accurate reflection of communication in the post-modern reality than a uniform theory can provide. Although there may be individual propositions of what constitutes competence that are true of many societies, the conjunction of any particular set of propositions is unlikely to be true of most (see Frazer and Nicholson 1990:29). We may therefore need to think in terms of clusters of factors that work in different combinations in different contexts. The theoretical emphasis would probably be more on constructing genealogies of the different views of competence. Where we do construct theories, they would have to be more local, and explicitly historical - and the various categories could be genealogized as well. But for the most part, the style of constructing knowledge would be comparativist rather than universalizing, "attuned to changes and contrasts instead of to covering laws," and would thus be more complex and multilayered. Moreover, these theories would have to insist on their own incompleteness (Denzin & Lincoln 1994:572).

I would now like to discuss culture from the perspective of post-modernism a little more closely, as it affects conceptions of competence.

POST-MODERN CULTURE

Although (most) post-modern thinkers do not deny the existence of a reality separate from our attempts to make sense of it, our understandings, or social constructions, are regarded as all we can ever know of "objective" reality. Culture thus becomes a really important concept, as our reality is more-or-less synonymous with our culture. We live in the symbolic universes we weave around us, not some objective reality. . "All the things that identify and define "a people" are the (usually reified) products of earlier inventions." (Anderson 1993:107). This means that culture (seen as a shared worldview) has to be taken very seriously, not merely treated as a variable in a study, but as the organizing principle of the study. Pearce & Kang argue that differences between cultures cannot merely be treated as "overlays" over the "same" objective realities: "the variety of ways people communicate . . . are not just different ways of doing the same things, because the "things" of culture differ, and sometimes have no precise correspondence." (1988:28)

At the same time, however, the circumstances of the post-modern era make the composition of cultures considerably more complex than ever before. The traditional view of culture as synonymous with a static nation-state (a fiction created for political ends) just no longer works. Anderson (1993:356) comments: "We live in the age of the fading boundary, the twilight of a mind-set that structured reality with sharp lines. The boundaries between nations, races, classes, cultures, species - all become less distinct." (See also, Rosaldo, 1989). Subcultures forge links all around the world - "free-floating communities of shared interests and ideology and information" (1993:23). Anderson also points out that what seems like the Westernization of the world is counterbalanced by a subtle Easternization . The global cultural changes taking place are multidimensional, "full of innovations and improvisations, ghost and disguises" (1993:24). Post-modern culture is multivocal, pluralistic and indeterminate. Although we may now envision one global culture, this culture is "a thin, fragile, and ever-shifting web of common ideas and values" balanced by "incredible diversity - more diversity than there has ever been" . As Nowlan (1993) comments, "Social reality is no longer conceived of as a structured whole, precisely understandable through theoretical inquiry, but rather as, instead, an amorphous globality comprised of a vast multiplicity of discrete localities 'articulated' and 'inter-articulated' in irreducibly complex and constantly shifting ways with each other." Obviously, the more diverse cultures become, the more value systems are available to people within a cultural group, and the more complex issues of competence become. Our research into competence therefore needs to focus on smaller, fragmented,

local cultural creations of social groups, and to take into account the dynamic nature of culture. Berry's (1992) analysis of acculturation also suggests that factors such as voluntariness and permanence of contact, as well as relationships of domination may influence what counts as competence between groups. Sonn (in press) provides a good example of this when he says that an important part of the survival skills of many Africans in South Africa has been acting as if one is "less than" the other in intercultural encounters. Another example is that for many homosexual people, privacy boundaries probably become an important competence issue, when confronting other people's homophobia. In other words, different positionalities as affected by various constraints within fairly specific contexts, will make different competencies become salient. Competence is determined not only by who is speaking, but also to whom, and under what. Again, there are some studies within the field that have been moving towards taking contextual factors into account, for example, Dinges & Lieberman 1989; and Spitzberg 1994. Moreover, an approach is emerging that views competence from a relational standpoint (Spitzberg 1994; Imahori & Lanigan 1989; Collier 1989). None of these, however, considers the constraints of power differentials, and the above argument suggests that context is central to an accurate reflection of how competence works. Similarly, the awareness of culture as a process, reflected in conceptualizing culture as a verb (see Conquergood 1991), and as travel (see Clifford 1992) also militates against viewing competence in static terms.

In many ways the post-modern acceptance of culture as socially constructed, makes the prognosis for intercultural competence actually more optimistic than when it was viewed in terms of inherent personal attributes. We are, in effect, dealing with one culture's fiction as opposed to another's. Anderson (1993:8) suggests that an important difference between the way that we inhabit our cultures in the emerging postmodern era as opposed to earlier historical periods, is that we are forced to make choices about our realities. We are "forced to be free," as we know that we have the option to choose an entirely different cultural framework , even is we don't want to have the choice. Most traditional research in intercultural communication assumes a premodem relationship between people and their culture. People are seen to behave as if there is no gulf between their social belief system and objective reality - they do not even realize they have a worldview. According to Anderson, our age is characterized by the fact that we are reflexive, and think about our thinking. Few people exist as the ethnographer's "primitive' who knows nothing about the possibility of cultural difference. We have an awareness of social institutions as social creations, and that social identities vary with culture (Anderson 1993:8). People feel free to create new cultural forms and to create new identities for themselves. This means that we can "step into" different constructions for the sake of good intercultural com-

munication, and step out again. The view of competence that seems to me to come closest to this understanding is that of Pearce & Kang (1987) who regard optimal competence as the ability to utilize the meaning resources of more than one culture. The emphasis in post-modernism is on being strategic. Intercultural competence can therefore be conceptualized as a collaboration to form temporary dialogic "coalitions" of social constructions, drawing from available possibilities of discourse those which are strategically appropriate for the purpose at hand, and accompanied by a great deal self-reflexivity. Anderson (1993:260) emphasizes that the awareness that a social construction is exactly that, a construction, does not diminish its value or usefulness. "Whenever we step out of a reality construct and step back in again, the stepping in involves both choice and creativity . . . As we become more sensitive to these various strategies, we discover that we are living in a much more interesting time than we may have suspected - a time when there are not only many realities, but many ways of living in them - and we may become more skilled at making such choices." My sense is that forming temporary constructions in this creative and strategic way is how most people experience the great number of intercultural encounters that they deal with in the present world. Probably, if a single quality is to emerge most prominently as characterizing competent intercultural communication in the post-modern era, it is the self-reflexivity required to create such constructions successfully. Self-reflexivity is the ability to see one's own constructions as such; to become aware of the way in which we reside in our own stories (Fergusen 1993).

The final underlying assumptions of post-modernism I would like to examine briefly, are those that relate to personhood, or identity, as these obviously also impact upon how competence is to be conceptualized.

PERSONHOOD IN THE POST-MODERN ERA

As mentioned in the first section of this paper, traditional conceptions of competence divide the person into cognitive, affective and conative dimensions. This accords with the view of the person held in modernist psychology, a view that has become reified in the competence literature. However, we need to recognise firstly, that this is just one possible story about what it means to be a person, and that different conceptions of personhood will inform other ideas about competence, relativizing the Western conception of competence. A very different conception of the self is explained by Vera Buhrman (in press), when she describes how the Nguni people of South Africa have traditionally understood personhood.

According to the Ngumi, man [sic] is composed of two parts: the body and the ancestor. The ancestor is not visible but is seen in dreams, visions and omens - it is real. The relationship between a person and the ancestors is symbiotic - they are not separate. The

living must keep the ancestors alive though rituals and ceremonies, whereas the ancestors protect their living kin and guide them in dreams. (p.6)

That this conception of a person will produce a radically different conception of competence goes without saying. Dealing competently with difficult communication situations, as with all problematic situations, therefore requires bringing one's behavior into alignment with the ancestors' wishes.

Secondly, the post-modern conception of personhood also departs fairly dramatically from a modernist psychological model. In post-modem thought a person is not seen to be a homogenous, autonomous being. The post-modem person is not the monolithic, humanistic, self-actualizing person of modemity. Nor are people assumed to have rational, or even conscious understandings of the meanings they ascribe. The inner-outer distinction disappears, and we are seen to be largely constructed at an unconscious level by the various discourses we are exposed to. We are intertextual. Lather (1991) argues that the post-modem self is contingent, shifting, multiple, and contradictory. This self is described in phrases such as "hyphenated identities" (see Fine 1994) and "mobile subjectivies" (Fergusen 1993). At the moment the only conceptualization of competence that I am aware of that tries to take into account a more complex sense of identity is that of Collier (1988), referred to before, which regards intercultural competence as the mutual confirmation of the interactants' cultural identities according to rule structures that differ for various ethnic groups, with different dimensions of identity becoming salient in different interactions.

An interesting departure form traditional conceptions of competence that is truly post-modern in spirit is Bateson's (1993) view which uses a performance paradigm. She sees effective intercultural communication as improvisation. Given the acute awareness within the post-modern consciousness that "All the world's a stage" (Anderson 1993:231) this seems a worthwhile line of thinking to pursue. The idea of identity as performance does not imply superficiality. As Butler's analysis of gender as performance superbly demonstrates; it can lead to a profound thinking through of the implications of what it means to exist in a reality that is constructed socially. A closely related paradigm that seems to be promising is that of narrative. Many writers stress the value of narrative in capturing the fluid and temporal nature of culture (Rosaldo 1989; Jackson 1989). Creating a coherent story is seen in constructivist therapy as the way in which one constructs one's selfhood. Our cultures provide us with plots which we adopt in configuring of ourselves. This should be a rewarding line of thought for competence studies, and one that Pearce & Kang (1988) approach when they talk of traveler's tales providing insights for dealing with modemity. Given that our social constructions of reality are so frequently referred to as stories, our conceptions of competence would be

stories about our stories.

CONCLUSION

To summarize the main thrust of this article, I have argued that the way in which intercultural competence has been conceptualized in communication studies needs to be revised in the light of more contemporary views of truth and knowledge, the nature of culture, and of personhood. We need to look for many possible stories about competence, from many cultures, interpretive communities, and positionalities within specific contexts, rather than to pursue the "excavation of one true story" (Fergusen 1993:21). We also need to listen to the stories different paradigms, such as discourse studies, narrative, and performance have to tell. This does not necessarily mean that the humanist psychological story must be jettisoned completely. Rather it must give up its claims to being the grand narrative that can uncover the "essentials" of competence, and take its place as one among many. Most importantly, we need to recognize that all these versions are social constructions (and provisional ones at that), useful, but not true in any ultimate sense. Nevertheless, in the multilayered patchwork created by these different stories, we come closer to understanding what constitutes good intercultural communication than any one conception could provide on its own.

REFERENCES

ABE, H. & WISEMAN, R. L. 1983. A cross-cultural confirmation of the dimensions of intercultural effectiveness. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 7:53-68.

ANDERSON, W. T. 1993. *Reality isn't what it used to be*. San Francisco: Harper.

ASANTE, M. K. 1987. *The Afrocentric idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

BATESON, M.C. 1993. Joint performance across cultures: Improvisation in a Persian garden. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, vol. 13:113-121.

BERRY, J. 1992. Psychology of acculturation. In R. W. Brislin (Ed.). *Applied cross cultural psychology*. CA: Sage.

BUHRMAN, V. (in press) African views of healing. In M.E. Steyn & K.B. Motshabi (Eds.). *Cultural synergy in the new South Africa: Weaving strands of Africa and Europe*. Johannesburg: Knowledge.

CARBAUGH, D. 1988. Comments on "culture" in communication inquiry. *Communication Reports*, vol. 1:38-41.

CARBAUGH, D. 1990. Culture talking about itself. In D. Carbaugh (Ed.) *Cultural communication and intercultural contact*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

CASMIR, F. L. 1983. Phenomenology, and Hermeneutics: Evolving approaches to the study of intercultural and international communication. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol.

7:309-324.

CLIFFORD, J. 1992. Traveling cultures. In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson & P. Treichler (Eds.). *Cultural studies*. NY: Routledge.

COLLIER, M. J. 1989. Cultural and intercultural communication competence: Current approaches and directions for future research. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 13(3):287-302.

COLLIER, M. J. 1993. Conflict competence within African, American, and Anglo American friendships. In R. L. Wiseman & J. Koester (Eds.). *Intercultural Communication Competence*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications : 133-154.

COLLIER, M. J., RIBEAU, S. A., & HECHT, M. L. 1986. Intracultural communication rules and outcomes within three domestic cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 10:439-457.

COLLIER, M. J. & THOMAS, M. 1989. Cultural identity in inter-cultural communication: An interpretive perspective. In W. B. Gudykunst & Y. Y. Kim (Eds.). Theorizing intercultural communication: International and intercultural communication. *International and Intercultural Annual*, vol. 12.

CONQUERGOOD, D. 1991. Rethinking ethnography. . . . *Communication Monographs*, vol. 58:179-194.

CRONEN, V. E., CHEN, V. & PEARCE, W. B. 1988. Coordinated Management of Meaning: A Critical Theory. In Y.Y. Kim & W. B. Gudykunst. *Theories in Intercultural Communication: International and Intercultural Communication Annual*. CA: Sage.

CUI, G. & VAN DEN BERG, S. 1991. Testing the construct validity of intercultural effectiveness. *International Journal of International Relations*, vol. 15:227-241.

DETWEILER, R.A. 1980. Intercultural interaction and the categorization process: A conceptual analysis and behavioral outcome. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 4:275-295.

DENZIN, N. K. & LINCOLN, Y. S. (Eds.) 1994. *Handbook of qualitative research*. CA: Sage.

DINGES, N. G., & LIEBERMAN, D. A. 1989. Intercultural communication competence: Coping with stressful work situations. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 13(3):371-386.

FERGUSEN, K. E. 1993. *The man question*. CA: University of California Press.

FLAX J. 1992. The end of innocence. In J. Butler & J. W. Scott (Eds.). *Feminists theorise the political*. NY: Routledge.

FINE, M. 1994. Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln. (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research*. CA: Sage.

FRAZER N. & NICHOLSON, L.J. 1990. Social criticism without philosophy: An encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism. In *Feminism/Postmodernism*. NY: Routledge.

HAMMER, M. R., GUDYKUNST, W. R., & WISEMAN R. 1978. Dimensions of intercultural effectiveness: An exploratory study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 2:382-392.

HARVEY, D. 1990. *The condition of post-modernity*. MA: Blackwell.

HAWKINSON, T. 1993. *Intercultural effectiveness: Research findings and applications to training*. Presented to SIETAR.

HECHT, M. L & RIBEAU, S. 1984. Ethnic communication : A comparative analysis of satisfying communication. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 8:135-151.

HECHT, M. L, RIBEAU, S., & ALBERTS, J. K. 1989. An Afro-American perspective on interethnic communication. *Communication Monographs*, vol. 56: 385-410.

HEGDE, R. S. 1994. *Conceptualization and measurement of communication competence: An Indian perspective*. Paper presented at the Speech Communication Conference, New Orleans.

HEGDE, R. S. 1994. *Swinging the trapeze: Communication competence and the experience of South Asian immigrant women*. Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Conference, New Orleans.

HOOKS, B. 1994. *Outlaw Culture: Resisting representation*. NY: Routledge.

HOUSTON, M. 1992. The politics of difference: Race, class and women's communication. In L.F. Rakow (Ed.). *Women making meaning*:45-59. NY: Routledge.

IMAHORI, T. T., & LANIGAN, M. L. 1989. Relational model of intercultural communication competence. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 13(3):269-286.

JACKSON, M. 1989. *Paths toward a clearing: Radical empiricism and ethnographic inquiry*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.

KOESTER, J., WISEMAN, R. L., SANDERS, J. A. 1993. Multiple perspectives of intercultural communication competence. In R. L. Wiseman & J. Koester (Eds.). *Intercultural Communication Competence*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications:3-15.

LATHER, P.A. 1991. *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*. NY: Routledge.

MARTIN, J. N. 1993. Intercultural communication competence: A review. In *Intercultural Communication competence*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications:16-29.

MARTIN, J. N., & HAMMER, M. R. 1989. Behavioral categories of intercultural communication competence: Everyday communicators' perceptions. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 13(3):303-332.

MIYAHARA, A. 1994. *Meta-theoretical issues in conceptualization and measurement of Japanese communication competence*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Speech Communication Association, New Orleans.

NAKAYAMA, T. & MARTIN, J. N. 1993. *The white problem, or to-*

wards a postcolonial intercultural communication. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Miami Beach.

NOLAN, 1994. Lecture notes

PEARCE, W.B. & KANG, K.W. 1987. Acculturation and communication competence. In D.L. Kincaid, (Ed.). *Communication Theory: Eastern and Western Perspectives*. NY: Academic Press.

PEARCE W. B. & KANG K. W. 1988. Conceptual migrations: Understanding "Travelers' tales for cross-cultural adaptation. In Y. Y. Kim & W. B. Gudykunst (Eds.). *Cross-cultural adaptation: Current approaches. International and intercultural annual XI*. CA: Sage.

REDMOND, M. V., & BUNYI, J. M. 1993. The relationship of intercultural communication competence with stress and the handling of stress as reported by international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 17: 235-254.

ROSALDO, R. 1989. *Culture and truth: The remaking of social analysis.* Boston: Beacon Press.

RUBEN, B. D. 1989. The study of cross-cultural competence: Traditions and contemporary issues. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 13(3): 229-240.

SONN, J. (In press) White racism also means distorting African culture and values. In M. E. Steyn & K.B. Motshabi.(Eds.). *Cultural synergy in the New South Afirca: Weaving strands of Africa and Europe*. Johannesburg: Knowledge.

SPITZBERG, B. H. 1989. Issues in the development of a theory of Interpersonal competence in the intercultural context. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 13(3):241-268.

SPITZBERG, B. H. 1994. A model of intercultural competence. In L. A. Samovar & R. E. Porter (Eds.). *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

SPITZBERG, B. H. & CUPACH, W. R. 1984. *Interpersonal Communication Competence*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

SPITZBERG, B. H., & HECHT, M. L. 1984. A component model of relational competence. *Human Communication Research*, vol. 10(4): 575-599.

STEPHAN, C. W., & STEPHAN, W. G. 1992. Reducing intercultural anxiety through intercultural contact. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 16:89-106.

TAYLOR, E. W. 1994. A learning model for becoming interculturally competent. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 18(3):389-408.

TRINH T. M. 1991. *When the moon waxes red: Representation gender and cultural politics*. NY: Routledge.

WISEMAN, R. L., HAMMER, M. R., NISHIDA, H. 1989. Predictors of intercultural communication competence. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, vol. 13(39):349-370.

YUM, J.O. 1994. *Conceptualizations and measurement of communica-*

tion competence: A Korean perspective. Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association.