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Name of Candidate: Beatriz Hernández-Moreno
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Thesis and Abstract Approved:

Dr. Thomas Field
Professor
Department of Modern Languages, Linguistics
and Intercultural Communication

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Abstract

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Beatriz Hernández-Moreno, MA, 2017

Directed By: Dr. Thomas Field, Professor at the Department of
Modern Languages, Linguistics and Intercultural
Communication

As globalization shifts towards an increasingly more interconnected conception of the world, many nations, cultures and people find themselves in intercultural situations with an unprecedented regularity. When these intercultural encounters take place, an individual needs to apply what has come to be called “intercultural competence” in order to act and communicate “effectively and appropriately.” Both public and private institutions, as well as scholars, have taken an interest in this new concept, and assessment tools to measure the degree that an individual may attain in such competence are now being used in a wide array of contexts. Assessing a concept whose meaning and implications are still being debated makes the task challenging, yet different fields are navigating these mostly-uncharted waters in search of the key that will enable intercultural competence to be taught, developed and assessed successfully in different situations. A critical mind, however, must ask some uncomfortable questions. What do labels like “effective,” “appropriate” or “successful” imply when applied to intercultural exchanges and how do they impact our modern conception of intercultural competence? Which philosophical currents and ideas inform the requirements for an individual to qualify as interculturally competent, and how do these ideas fit into the current globalized era we live in? Is it possible to frame the contextualization of intercultural competence and its assessment by determining the gaps, flaws and limitations that its practical application possesses, and what does this mean for its future theoretical,

conceptual and practical development? None of these questions has an easy answer. This paper hopes to shed some light on what lies behind intercultural competence and its assessment, at a philosophical, historical and practical level. After all, although the concept seems to be widely considered acceptable, positive and worth of encouragement, what is often overlooked is the fact that it was created within a specific system and born of a specific philosophy of mind, and thus fulfils a specific purpose in the delicate, imbalanced dynamics that exist between cultures and nations nowadays.

**INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AND ITS ASSESSMENT: A CRITICAL
CONTEXTUALIZATION**

By

Beatriz Hernández-Moreno

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, Baltimore County, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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2017

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Dedication

This dissertation would not be what it is if it had not been for my incredible parents. They have instilled in me an insatiable thirst for knowledge since a very young age and have always encouraged me to look at the bigger picture, exercise critical thinking, and, overall, take everything with a grain of salt. From my mom, who sadly passed away right before I started my MA program at UMBC, I inherited a love for logical and sensible thinking, as well as the understanding of the value of hard work and fairness to all; and from my dad, I took a curious and suspicious mind who seeks to get to the bottom of things and has the courage of confronting dense and obscure writing and still manage to make some sense of it.

Having been so lucky to have them both in my life, I dedicate this thesis to my parents.

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1. Introduction

Intercultural competence is one of those terms that are widely applauded wherever they go, yet its concrete meaning and implications are widely debated by scholars and practitioners alike. Perhaps this happens because the term evokes an idyllic image of two people from different cultures coming together in perfect harmony and putting aside their differences and loving each other, or because it is simply in fashion at the moment, given the tumultuous current world events and is promoted as the panacea for all problems human beings have with each other. This is, perhaps, what intercultural competence hopes to become one day, but it would be extremely naïve to think this is what intercultural competence represents in its current form. Putting aside the academic conceptual fights over its definition, there also exist other potential issues that need to be addressed (and hardly ever are) in order to ensure that any implementation of intercultural competence does not become yet one more instrument of ideological, political and economic oppression within the globalized capitalist world dynamics. Very little theoretical research on intercultural competence and its assessment, and even less practical research that tests existing evaluation tools, has been conducted, and new and more innovative projects are needed in order to draw a better correlation between intercultural competence and its impact on cultural and societal groups, as well as to examine whether or not assessment tools actually measure what they claim to be evaluating (Fantini, 2009: 465; Garrett-Rucks, 2012: 25; Sinicrope et al., 2007: 11-12). It is often unclear if the results these tools produce match reality, and this calls for an urgent upgrading of the definition, tools, assessment and “mission statement” of intercultural competence in order to increase our understanding of how its development takes place in individuals, how it affects intergroup conceptions of each other and which specific factors and contextual features influence it. The answers to these incognita embody key information that could then be used to redesign the perception and impact of intercultural competence

in a way that attends to and accounts for its role within the world order and the philosophical, moral and societal implications of any attempt to implement it.

In sum, this paper seeks to emphasize that intercultural competence is not just the practical expression of communicative abilities between two cultures, as it is usually understood (this actually matches better the field of pragmatics and other areas of sociolinguistics), but also the process that establishes the relationship dynamics between groups, which can either take the form of unequal hierarchies or of balanced understanding and respect for other cultures. It could be said that intercultural competence is a kind of double-edged artifact, with a positive and a negative side, and because of this, guaranteeing that its implementation is constructive and egalitarian is paramount.

The following sections of this paper attempt to reflect critically on the intrinsic conceptual nature, philosophical stance and practical reality of the assessment of intercultural competence. Section 2 describes the methodology that was followed during the writing and research of this paper. Section 3 establishes the existing theoretical foundation of intercultural competence by analyzing its conceptual entanglement due to the diverse definitions of “culture” and “intercultural competence,” as well as exploring the diversity of frameworks and models that inform the many fields that claim to “own” the term. Section 4 looks closely at the assessment of intercultural competence, its characteristics, the existing tools and their variety, purpose and issues. In addition, it hypothesizes about what “good” assessment could (or should?) look like for intercultural competence and puts it to scrutiny to see if current approaches comply with the six principles of test usefulness. Sections 5 and 6 explore which schools of thought and philosophies lie at the core of the requirements for an individual to qualify as interculturally “competent” and how this may fit into the current globalized capitalist era we live in. In these two sections, the works of several authors are

used to contextualize the reality of intercultural competence philosophically and critically, most notably Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic power and violence, cultural capital, habitus and indoctrination, and Wallerstein's usages of culture, conceptions of modernization-Westernization, universalism, and capitalism as a world system. Section 7 hopes to act as the necessary bridge between theory and practice within this paper. Using grounded theory, the data collected from 17 participants is analyzed using a combination of an existing tool (INCA tool) and an ethnographic supplement (interviews) in order to find proof of whether, and to what extent, empirical results support or disprove the theories laid out in the first part of this paper. Finally, section 8 brings the paper to a conclusion and proposes the incorporation of interculturality as a possible answer, or at least a mindful aid, in making the training and assessment of intercultural competence more focused and fair to all. The ultimate goal of this thesis paper is to determine whether the presumption of trying to train and measure such a construct is feasible, unbiased and sensible or if, on the contrary, it is founded on and promotes inequality, ideological oppression and global injustice.

2. Methodology and research questions

This MA thesis project is of a highly interdisciplinary nature and attempts to bring together relevant areas within the fields of culture studies, discourse analysis, ethnography, philosophy and assessment, and apply selected theory from each of them to the conception and practice of intercultural competence in order to attain a double purpose consisting of:

1) Performing a critical theoretical analysis that will 1.1) examine the most important definitions of intercultural competence and its varying subcomponents, 1.2) analyze the current state of intercultural competence assessment, and whether such assessment complies with the six principles of test usefulness, 1.3) contextualize in a critical manner the

role of intercultural competence and its assessment within the world order and the philosophical, moral and societal implications of any attempt to implement it, and

2) Carrying out practical research using one existing tool (the Intercultural Competence Assessment (INCA) tool) and evaluating the resulting data using grounded theory and ethnography to frame its contextualization.

The first part of the paper will conduct a comprehensive literature review in order to reflect on the intrinsic nature and academic discussion of intercultural competence and its assessment, as well as attempt to link its current conception with the philosophy that lies at the core of the requirements for an individual to qualify as interculturally competent. In other words, the past and present of intercultural competence will be put to scrutiny in order to inform this theoretical analysis by calling upon relevant literature from a wide array of areas. The second part, in turn, will focus on the “future” of intercultural competence, or what that future should take into account in order to improve over its present state. To achieve this, grounded theory will be used to draw on the most salient elements of the application of intercultural competence assessment and thus point out the issues and flaws that the current approaches are overlooking.

Although there exist several sub-schools of grounded theory, the differences among them lie not in the method itself but in the overarching goals they try to achieve (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014: 13). In a nutshell, the general idea behind grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) could be described as “a largely inductive method of developing theory through close-up contact with the empirical world” (Denzin and Lincoln 2008, in Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014: 8). Garret and Young further explain that:

“Grounded theory emphasizes the meaning of experience for participants while allowing the researcher to generate or discover a theoretical framework within which social processes can be accurately described and fully explained. Thus, theories or ideas about a social and psychological process [...] can become “grounded” in data from the field and, more specifically, in the actions, interactions, and social processes of learners” (Garret & Young, 2009: 211).

As such, during the data analysis of section 7, the researcher will focus on “manually coding, categorizing and comparing data, without the guidance of a preconceived theory” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, in Higginbottom G., & Lauridsen, E.I, 2014: 9) while also incorporating a constructivist approach in the form of “human reflection, choice, and action” (Charmaz 2008a, in Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014: 9). It is the understanding of the researcher that grounded theory has not been widely employed before to develop theory for the field of intercultural competence and its assessment, but it could truly benefit from such an approach. Using grounded theory to link the theory and reality of intercultural competence can make up for many of the criticisms that its research currently faces, such as not accounting for the participants’ experiences and not having a defined, agreed-upon definition of what the concept is or what it entails. Basically, by adopting a reverse method (i.e. reality to theory/theories instead of the other way around) the approach adopted here could make the practical reality of intercultural competence shape its theoretical field, thus ensuring that forthcoming theories on the field adopt stances that are accurate, truthful and relevant to its implementation in the real world.

Within this paper, the method was tested on 17 American students of Spanish as a foreign language studying and attending classes at UMBC. The male-female ratio was roughly 50/50, and their foreign language levels and previous international/intercultural experiences fall everywhere across the spectra of foreign language level (basic, intermediate, advanced) and exposure to international/intercultural experience (basic, fair, broad, extensive). First,

the participants were asked to fill a biographical survey and to react to questions related to five fictitious scenarios in writing, after which they attended a personalized, individual 30-minute oral interview with the researcher.

- Survey and scenarios: The INCA tool, which is the one that this research put through the scrutiny of grounded theory, features both a biographical survey and scenarios. However, due to the simplicity of the former in its original form (which provided very little information regarding the participant's life and previous experiences) and the superficiality of the scenarios, the survey and scenarios employed during this study were designed by the researcher based on their potential to resonate and incite meaningful responses from the participants of the study. The purpose of the survey is to gather personal data and previous intercultural/international experiences of the participants, and the scenarios feature intercultural situations followed by questions that participants had to answer with their reactions to the depicted situations¹. Although the survey and the scenarios are the original work of the researcher, the test structure and test implementation indicated by the INCA Assessor Manual were fully respected, as were the assessment rubrics included within the tool, which were used to assess the participants' degrees of intercultural competence as established by the tool. It should be mentioned that the INCA tool itself features role play in addition to the survey and scenarios, as well as a second survey. This survey had been employed by the researcher in another study and was not found to provide useful information; for this reason, it was not employed this time. Role plays were also eliminated due to the limited scope of this project. The complete INCA assessment evaluates six sub-categories of intercultural competence, individually referred to as "competences" (Tolerance of Ambiguity, Behavioral Flexibility, Communicative Awareness, Knowledge Discovery,

¹ Cf. appendix to see the survey and scenarios that were distributed to the participants.

Respect for Otherness, and Empathy) which are grouped two-by-two in three kinds of intercultural competence referred to as “strands” (Openness, Knowledge and Adaptability) and then assigned the level of intercultural competence each participant achieves for each of them (basic, intermediate or full). However, given the limited scope of this project, the Communicative Awareness competence (part of the Adaptability strand) was not studied due to the fact that it requires extensive role play to be tested appropriately.

- Interview: After the surveys and scenarios were completed by the participants, an ethnographic element in the form of interviews was incorporated in the research in order to take into account their backgrounds, experiences and life stories to help make associations between the subjects’ utterances and what lies beyond them socially and at an individual level. The individual interviews lasted about 30 minutes per participant, and each was tailor-made depending on the responses the participant in question gave in the survey and scenarios. The inclusion of this ethnographic element in the project guaranteed that the backgrounds, experiences and life stories of the participants could be used to compare, contrast, judge, support and inform the critical analysis of intercultural competence assessment that ensued. During this analysis, all the gathered data was openly coded and classified by applying grounded theory in order to expose the limitations, gaps and flaws of the INCA tool and, by extension when applicable, to the general application of intercultural competence conception and assessment. The steps followed during this analysis were:

- 1) The participants’ utterances were openly coded and classified into different categories of information, and more specifically in this case, categories of problematic elements arising from the application of intercultural competence assessment (e.g. internal inconsistencies across a participant’s discourse, limitations of the prompts, conflicts across the subsections of the rubric etc.).

2) In the next step, axial coding, the researcher identified the most salient or relevant categories obtained during the open coding stage “and then (a) explore[d] conditions that influence the category, (b) identify[d] actions or interactions that result from the major category, (c) identify[d] the conditions that influence the actions, and (d) delineate[d] the outcomes for this category” (Garret & Young, 2009: 211-212).

3) During the final stage, selective coding, the researcher combined the information analyzed in the previous two stages and created a larger synthesized narrative, which is the result that is presented in section 7 of this paper.

It is important to note that all tests and interviews were carried out in English, since the purpose of this study is not to evaluate foreign language competency and English was the mother tongue of all the participants.

• Research questions: Given the fact that this paper draws on different fields to both inform the comprehensive literature review of the first part and analyze the data obtained during the practical research, the following three research questions were selected as the ones that best represent the multi and interdisciplinary inquiries of this paper:

1) What do labels like “effective” and “appropriate” imply when applied to intercultural exchanges and how do they impact our modern conception of intercultural competence?

2) Which philosophical currents and ideas inform the requirements for an individual to qualify as interculturally competent, and how do these ideas fit into the current globalized era we live in?

3) Is it possible to frame the contextualization of intercultural competence and its assessment by determining the gaps, flaws and limitations that its practical application possesses, and what does this mean for its future theoretical, conceptual and practical development?

3. The field of intercultural competence: Culture as a contested notion

Human beings are complex, and it is only logical that our ways of expressing ourselves and communicating with each other are complex, too. We strive to find meaning in everything that surrounds us and in those surrounding us. In the words of Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson, “we hunger for significance” (Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey, 2014: ep. 3). We, human beings, following this need for significance, became the designers of our systems of symbols – the forms they adopted, the specific meanings they carried and the precise ways in which they interrelated with each other. All these jointly form the bricks of what we have come to denominate “culture,” which we express through our languages, pragmatics and practices. Theoretical and philosophical reflections on the nature of culture usually end at this point, when most feel satisfied with a basic explanation of what sub-elements make up culture. Nonetheless, a deeper, more analytical next step is crucial if the real impact of cultural and intercultural exchanges is to be fully understood. This next step, which will be explored further in the following sections, begins with the realization that human beings, in addition to being mere receivers of culture (a passive role), are simultaneously its designers, transmitters and challengers (active roles). Not for nothing does the etymological origin of the word “culture” lie in the past participle of the Latin verb *colere* – to cultivate (agriculture), the tilling of land. By extension, it came to mean “to worship, to care, to tend, to guard.” It

should then not come as a surprise that humans, by instinct, feel a strong attachment to their own cultures, and feel the need to worship their associated practices and beliefs and defend them from external attacks – figurative or literal. But before the discourse of this paper ventures deeper into the muddy waters of the ethical, political and philosophical implications that affect the training and assessment of intercultural competence, more foundational questions related to its conception and current practice must be reviewed.

Let us start with “culture.” The academic debate surrounding the term is very extensive and, sadly, cannot be fully covered in the limited scope of this paper in all the necessary detail. Leaving etymology aside to focus on more widely cited and conceptually relevant definitions of culture, let us look at some insightful examples to frame this paper’s narrative:

- Geertz (in Sorrells, 2013: 4) defines culture as “a web of symbols people use to create meaning and order in their lives.”
- Wallerstein (1990), for his part, differentiates between two usages of the term:
 - Usage 1: The “set of characteristics which distinguish one group from another” (p.33).
 - Usage 2: The “set of phenomena which are different from (and ‘higher’ than) some other set of phenomena within any one group” (p.33).

It must be noted that the “culture” being described in Geertz’s definition, as well as in Wallerstein’s usage 1, is implied to be occurring in a vacuum, a scenario which is hardly the case in reality, and very little scrutiny of these seemingly straightforward, neutral definitions exposes complex issues that can arise from their practical application. As Wallerstein puts it, “since it is obvious that interests fundamentally diverge, it follows that such constructions of ‘culture’ are scarcely neutral” (Wallerstein, 1990: 39). For instance, for Wallerstein’s usages, it would be pertinent to ask whether every group *has* a culture, or *who* decides *who* possesses a culture, or *what* set of characteristics qualify as culture. In Geertz’s example,

trying to specify who “people” are and what do “meaning and order” represent for different groups would suffice to further stress the problematic nature of the concept. Wallerstein’s usage 2, for its part, explicitly and bluntly points out to the inherent, yet hardly universal knowledge, that, in fact, any given culture is eligible to host socially constructed hierarchies and inequalities at an internal level. Furthermore, this notion is also perfectly applicable to cases where two or more cultures interact with each other, which widens the scope of these potential hierarchies and inequalities to an intercultural dimension in addition to an intracultural one.

As it can be deduced from the issues these definitions pose, the notion of culture is highly problematic, yet we cannot ignore the crucial role they play in the history of human existence and human communication. Every human has an inner impulse to champion their own culture against others, which ensures that it is challenging to communicate across cultures while guaranteeing unbiased exchanges. In order to achieve a fair intercultural exchange, the interlocutors involved must shut down their loud, inner tribal instincts in order to listen and communicate better with each other, but this is by no means a simple task and requires that the interlocutors possess a particular set of skills that enables them to consider equally both their own culture and that of the other person. It is when two or more individuals or groups manage to exchange meaning and handle both their and the others’ systems of symbols successfully that they are said to possess a high degree of intercultural competence. However, let us not forget that individuals and groups are usually not aware of their own systems of symbols nor that of others, let alone see themselves as active designers, transmitters or challengers of such systems. In reality, the meaning embedded in cultures and cultural practices is simply presupposed to be shared (Sorrells, 2013: 6) and therefore, as Jan Blommaert eloquently puts it, “whenever discourses travel across the globe, what is carried with them is their shape, but their value, meaning, or function do not

often travel along" (Blommaert 2005: 72, in Kramsch, 2011: 358). It may easily seem a hopeless case, since, in the words of Kramsch, "how can one mediate, that is, interpret one's own and the other's culture each in terms of the other, if at the same time one's interpretation is culturally determined?" (Kramsch, 2011: 355). This is the key question that intercultural competence hopes to be the answer to. Its field, however, is far from being free of problems and confusion.

Intercultural competence is one of those concepts on whose importance and relevance everybody, expert or not, seems to agree, yet no one is able to define exactly what it is or what it entails (Deardorff, 2006: 247; Fantini, 2000: 26). There still exists much academic debate surrounding the idea and purpose behind intercultural competence at all imaginable levels (terminological issues, interchangeability with other terms, ethical implications, areas of application, implementation, etc.), and today, almost thirty years since the debate started, scholars have still not reached agreement (Deardorff, 2006: 242; Sinicrope et al., 2007: 1). For instance, the vast collection of parallel terms that are used interchangeably as synonyms or quasi-synonyms of intercultural competence is very good proof of the lack of agreement from which the field suffers: e.g. multiculturalism, cross-cultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, international competence, global competence or transcultural communication are just some of the most popular terms that are happily and freely used interchangeably with intercultural competence (see Fantini's complete list in Fantini, 2009: 457). A glance at the existing literature on the topic can also provide some widely-cited definitions, such as Deardorff's: "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (2004: 194 in Deardorff, 2006: 247-248), which was the top-rated definition by scholars in a study which intended to shed light on this terminological debate (cf. Deardorff, 2006), or Fantini's: "a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with

others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (2009: 458; Sinicrope et al., 2007: 1), which is very close to Deardorff’s idea, yet both bear their own subtleties. However, since the object of this paper is not the terminological debate surrounding intercultural competence (this topic certainly deserves its own study), and since, as Garrett-Rucks puts it, “all [definitions] essentially account for the ability to step beyond one’s own culture and function with individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds” (2012: 12), let us focus instead on what scholars *do* seem to agree on.

According to Fantini, there are three common components to the existing definitions of intercultural competence, namely: “1) the ability to develop and maintain relationships, 2) the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with minimal loss or distortion, and 3) the ability to attain compliance and obtain cooperation with others” (2000: 26). In addition, he further states that interculturalists also concur on the fact that, when we learn about another culture and language, a reflexive process with respect to one’s own worldviews is set in motion, and this awakens a powerful awareness in the individual (26, in *ibid.*). With these basic notions in mind, a newcomer to the field should be able to navigate the terminological jungle of intercultural competence and stay current with scholars’ efforts to define and develop the concept more easily. This is especially important considering that practitioners do not always devote the necessary time and effort to review the literature on the topic and, instead, create new, on-the-spot definitions and conceptions to serve temporary needs without consulting the existing research, all of which contributes to the entanglement of the field (Deardorff, 2009: 479; Deardorff, 2006: 258). The fact is that this is just one of the challenges faced by intercultural competence, and its lack of specificity “is due presumably to the difficulty of identifying the specific components of this complex concept” (Deardorff, 2006: 241). What, indeed, are the inherent components of intercultural competence?

One of the central objections the notion of intercultural competence faces is that of being presented in too broad a manner or, in contrast, as a “disjointed list of attributes” (Deardorff, 2006: 253). Both options represent a challenge for practitioners in general, and for assessment in particular. It is paramount to remember that assessment is (or should be) “an integral part of the educational process, not only at the end. Assessment seeks to ascertain whether and to what extent our students attain the objectives set forth” (Fantini, 2009: 475). Being, therefore, an integral part of a whole process, practitioners of any kind (interculturalists, teachers, human resources specialists etc.) should know exactly what they expect to achieve before they embark on an aimless time and effort-consuming quest. In order to discern what specific aspects of intercultural competence should be considered for assessment in each situation, Sinicrope et al. suggest establishing the following beforehand: “(a) the specific purposes or uses to which the assessment will be put; and (b) the particular local conceptualization of intercultural competence that characterizes what is to be learned and/or how learners are intended to change” (Sinicrope et al., 2007: 50). In other words: set measurable objectives and choose a theoretical framework that will guide the context and end goal of the assessment. On the other end of the academic spectrum, more pessimistic experts simply feel that intercultural competence just cannot and will not be assessed (Deardorff, 2009: 477). But let us not be defeated by such claims.

The literature shows that several authors agree with Sinicrope et al. and defend the establishment of clear, measurable objectives as one effective option to link the wide collection of attributes that may conform intercultural competence to its assessment. For instance, Fantini provides the following reflection on the matter: “What abilities are needed, in addition to language, for successful intercultural interaction? The answer to this question is key to the assessment process. Any lack of clarity on this point means that the focus of

assessment is likewise unclear” (2009: 457). Other authors have also called for a clear-cut definition of objectives “to ensure that the goals are aligned” with the assessment (for instance, Deardorff and Byram have both defended this; cf. Deardorff, 2009 and Garrett-Rucks, 2012). *A priori*, it may seem that setting measurable objectives could be the solution to this training and assessment problem of intercultural competence, since different, appropriate objectives could be set for each situation, depending on the intercultural needs at hand. As Deardorff illustrates it, “specific measurable outcomes for interculturally competent engineers may vary from those for interculturally competent health care workers” (2009: 479). Although measurable outcomes is definitely an interesting notion worth keeping in mind, sadly, it is far from addressing many other important issues, such as “What are the relevant abilities to assess within intercultural competence? Are they properly addressed in education and training efforts? Is there a clear relationship between instruction and evaluation? Are we assessing what really matters?” (Fantini, 2009: 457). The answers to these questions are especially complicated when we consider how inter and multidisciplinary the field of intercultural competence is.

When dealing with intercultural competence, it is vital to keep in mind at all times that several subfields (psychology, communication studies, international relations, instructional design, anthropology, business, education etc.) claim intercultural competence to be “their” term, and therefore its conception, purposes in research and evolution overtime vary greatly (Sinicrope et al., 2007: 1). This is the first thing to keep in mind when selecting a theoretical framework and/or an assessment tool to serve a given purpose. Before choosing a tool, investigation of existing theoretical frameworks is essential, since some (although not all) of the existing tools are based on them. Some of the most widely-cited frameworks are the ones proposed by Ruben (1976), Bennet (1993), Fantini (1995), Byram (1997), Deardorff (2004) and Arasaratnam & Doerfel (2005) among many. Again, the scope of this paper falls

very short to analyze these (and other) frameworks in detail, but there is one thing that must be mentioned: they are all very different, focus on different aspects of the concept and were designed with different purposes in mind. Sinicrope et al. summarize it brilliantly:

“Some models stress the communicative nature of intercultural competence, while others emphasize an individual's adaptation and development when confronted with a new culture, and still others focus on empathic and tolerant reactions to other cultures. Ultimately, these models seek to explain the types of skills and abilities individuals need to function in culturally diverse settings and the processes they undergo in developing the needed skills and abilities for being interculturally competent.” (Sinicrope et al., 2007: 11-12)

In sum, it can be gathered that the challenges faced by the assessment of intercultural competence begin at its roots, with the key term that puts together the notion itself, culture, being highly contested and debated in all spheres and its applications varying in scope, purpose and conceptualization. It goes without saying that, when no agreement has been reached at such foundational levels, it should be expected that more complex and controversial issues arise from a deeper look into what culture represents within the current world order and what its exact social function might be.

4. Assessing intercultural competence: Tools and requirements

As may be gathered from the previous section, defining what intercultural competence is and what it entails is a daunting task on its own, so it should not come as a surprise that trying to assess it will only makes matters more tangled. Once a practitioner decides that there is a need for assessment (in whatever context and for whatever purposes, depending on a one-by-one case consideration), the next step of the process would be to decide what assessment instrument to use for such a context and purposes. Again, an analysis of the existing tools leaves a strong *déjà vu* feeling, as, unsurprisingly, a tangled, multifaceted

theory has given rise to the most varied array of tools, each informed by a different background philosophy or framework and designed with a different focus:

“Some instruments bear superordinate titles that designate composites of abilities, others address varying subcomponents of intercultural competence. Some instruments focus on lingual rather than cultural aspects; some do the opposite. Other instruments stress international rather than intercultural and thereby exclude differences within national boundaries; still others are simply ambiguous and their intent is unclear” (Fantini, 2009: 457).

In addition to having differing foci, these tools also differ in their availability (“some appear in journal publications, others can be accessed online, and still others are available commercially or are administrated for a fee by specialized agencies or organizations” (Fantini, 2009: 465)) and in the type of assessment they provide (“some are predictive; others are formative, normative, and/or summative” (Fantini, 2009: 465)). The issue with this is not only that intercultural competence assessment tools come in all shapes and sizes, but that a given tool will endorse only the theoretical foundations that justify its existence and give a rationale for the criteria that will inform its practical application, but will usually not bother to present other options for alternative operationalizations of intercultural competence assessment. This partial representation then leaves the reader with an incomplete (and often biased) understanding of how assessment works (or *could* potentially work) for intercultural competence, as well as what intercultural competence *is* or *should* be, which ties back to the conceptual issues that were discussed in the previous section. To aid the reader of this paper, I have devised a comprehensive table with all the possible “pick-and-mix” options for instrument classification that I hope will serve as a compass to navigate the forthcoming analysis and reflection on them:

Internal vs. external	Using a tool designed by a department, organization or teacher for their own goals vs. using an existing, ready-made tool (commercial or non-commercial).
Direct vs. indirect	Abilities are assessed/reported by an expert based on direct proof vs. Abilities are assessed/reported by non-experts or by the subject (self-assessment) based on surveys and questionnaires
Method	Quantitative (surveys, questionnaires etc.) vs. qualitative (performance assessment, portfolio assessment, interviews etc.)
Assessment agent	Self-report vs. other-report vs. expert-report.
Commercial vs. non-commercial	Made for profit and/or commercial use vs. made for academic purpose and/or without a commercial purpose.
Upholding theory	Based on an existing theoretical framework vs. free-standing or purposely-made to account for a specific scenario.
Target audience & demographics	Businesses, study abroad programs, diplomats, language students... Children, teenagers, adults, workers abroad, immigrants...
Tested construct – What is measured?	Language proficiency, intercultural readiness, interpersonal abilities, learning styles, stress and anxiety, adaptability, sensitivity, awareness...
Author's field of expertise	Training, human resources, psychology, language, education, international relations, conflict resolution...
Philosophical background	Western vs. Eastern vs. other approach to intercultural competence
It should be noted that a single instrument may fit more than one descriptor within the same category.	

Table 1. Classification of intercultural competence assessment tools.

No matter which classification is chosen, scholars insist on the importance of variety, be it in terms of method (there is a notable emphasis in the joint use of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Deardorff, 2006: 241 and 250)), the placement of the assessment (“ongoing, integrated, aligned, and intentional” (Fantini, 2009: 465)) or the number of tools used (“a single instrument alone is usually inadequate” (Fantini, 2009: 465)). At the same time, no vagueness or ambiguity should be allowed when deciding the end goal of the assessment, since the desired outcomes and objectives should be made very clear no matter how many ways are used to achieve them: “When selecting an instrument, it is important to understand exactly what each instrument measures and to be sure that its purpose is compatible with the goals and objectives being assessed. There is no point to

using an external instrument if it does not provide the information you want” (Fantini, 2009: 465). Having established this, let us focus in on the object of our interest: What type of information should be expected to be obtained from an intercultural competence assessment tool? And, more importantly, once that information is gathered, how reliable is it, and how do we plan to act on such information?

Before moving on to the philosophical sections of this paper and delving more deeply into the social implications of intercultural competence and what its assessment represents on a grander scale, the importance of complying with general test quality requirements should be mentioned. The characteristics of a “good” and “appropriate” assessment tool are yet another recurrent battlefield for debate among experts, and since the assessment of intercultural competence is still that, a form of assessment, it should be reviewed and scrutinized to check whether it meets minimum validity and reliability requirements, among other criteria, in order to make sure it is indeed suitable and effective (Deardorff, 2009: 481-485; Fantini, 2009: 461-462 and 465; Sercu, 2004: 79-85). It is impossible (and probably irresponsible) to give a deterministic, final definition of what “good” or “successful” assessment *is* or what components it *should* have. Once this is acknowledged, however, one can indeed venture into reflecting and illustrating what good assessment *could* be or what it *could* look like, as well as exploring what the existing literature has to say on the topic. In any case, it should always be borne in mind that “a test which proves ideal for one purpose may be quite useless for another” (Hughes, 2003: 6), so there will always be room for modification in order to adapt to the purpose at hand. The starting question that should be asked is: Why do we assess in the first place? The key function of good assessment is that, as Hughes puts it, “we use tests to obtain information” (Hughes, 2003: 9). Based on this, a working definition of “good assessment” could be: the assessment that provides instructors, researchers, test-makers, institutions or other interested parties with the

information they seek and/or need to obtain. The next step would be to ask: What specific criteria make an assessment good or successful?

An important notion of any assessment which is relevant in the area of intercultural competence especially is that it should not happen in a vacuum. For example, Davies (1968: 5) teaching fills that vacuum: "the good test is an obedient servant, since it follows and apes the teaching." However, according to Carr, there are two main types of test: "those that are closely related to a teaching or learning curriculum, and those that are not" (Carr, 2011: 6). For those that are not, however, he does specify that they are usually nevertheless still based on something tangible in order to be successful. For example, proficiency tests usually follow objectives set forth by the examining institution, so in a way, it can be concluded that they are not so different from curriculum-based assessment insofar as they all follow some sort of measurable objectives. Then, are previous instruction and setting measurable objectives a guarantee that the subsequent assessment will be successful? Well, not necessarily. Hughes makes a compelling case regarding the limitations of using the objectives of a course in order to create course achievement tests. He states that "successful performance on the test may not truly indicate successful achievement of course objectives" (Hughes, 2003: 13). In practice, this means that general high-achievement in a test does not guarantee that the results reflect the true nature or quality of the assessment, and can wrongly give test-makers inaccurate information as to the real abilities of test-takers. This is sensible, since simply making assessment part of the educational process and setting measurable objectives does not guarantee that a test will be designed effectively and skillfully, and not even the best assessment contextualization can make up for a sloppy or inadequate test design. For this reason, a careful design that attends to the principles of test usefulness (i.e. reliability, validity, authenticity, interactiveness, impact and practicality) is paramount (Bachman and Palmer, 1996). Any assessment that does not comply fully with

these criteria would certainly not be considered successful, since it would exhibit important flaws in its conception that would prevent it from being so.

When the six principles of test usefulness are reviewed with intercultural competence assessment in mind specifically, thought-provoking deductions arise. Some, like practicality (i.e. the balance between the needed resources to implement assessment and the available resources to do so in an efficient and effective manner) or authenticity (i.e. the correspondence between the characteristics of test tasks and the real world), could be easier for intercultural competence to comply with – although it should be borne in mind that this does not mean they automatically do. Like any other form of assessment, the design and implementation of intercultural competence tests should account for material constraints of all kinds (e.g. human, physical, time, or budget available resources and considerations), including any potential difficulties that may arise during implementation and scoring deriving from these constraints (Bachman & Palmer, 1996: 37); they must also ensure that the tasks that test-takers will deal with would be relevant for true intercultural encounters and/or that they would encounter similar situations in a real encounter, as opposed to a task featuring in the test but having no real connection with reality. However, even if achieving the necessary standards for practicality and authenticity in intercultural competence assessment is no easy task, out of the six principles of test usefulness, the two that are usually considered the most important to achieving a well-designed, fair assessment, the ones that cast the most serious doubts on the legitimacy of the assessment of intercultural competence are reliability and validity. Although all six principles of test usefulness are very closely interrelated, and falling short in some would surely affect the others as well, the relationship between validity and reliability is perhaps the strongest of all.

Reliability refers to the property of a test directly related to its consistency. Consistency, in turn, is to be understood as uniformity in measurement (a.k.a. marking) attained by test-takers regardless of the testing situation. For instance, changes in testing environment, place or time, should not result in much difference in the scores attained by test-takers in order for a test to be considered reliable. In addition, test-takers are expected to score consistently no matter the scorer assigned to their test and to attain a consistent score on different versions of the same assessment tool across institutions, counties, states or even countries. All these can be tricky standards for intercultural competence assessment to meet. Intercultural competence is extremely affected by its testing environment and time, as well as the recent experiences of test-takers (more so than older ones) that could have an impact on their affective schemata, all of which can affect their score. A student freshly arrived from a successful study abroad experience, for example, would probably score differently from someone who just had a bad experience with a shop assistant from another culture. In addition, taking the same intercultural competence test while in one's home country or abroad can also bear very different results. For tests to be reliable, Hughes (2003: 44-47) recommends gathering enough samples of behavior, excluding items which do not discriminate well between weaker and stronger students, not allowing too much freedom in the answers, writing tasks unambiguously and providing clear and explicit instructions, among other important considerations. None of these criteria transfers very well when applied to intercultural competence, as open-ended, ambiguous scenarios are the ones where an individual's intercultural abilities are best demonstrated, and restricting these would affect the authenticity of the test very significantly and render the test useless.

Validity, for its part, makes reference to the extent to which a test truthfully measures what it claims to measure. Validity should be demonstrated by a wide range of evidence from multiple perspectives, which includes, but is not limited to: researching and proving that the

construct to be measured *exists*, *can* be measured, and *is* measured within the test, designing a rubric or set of scoring criteria that is consistent and clearly defined, as well as ensuring that the test actually assesses the targeted constructs (and not some others), and that such constructs are relevant for and sufficiently represented in that particular test (Hughes, 2003). In addition, the test must comply with reliability standards: if a test is not reliable, it cannot be valid either. Again, it is easy to see why it would be particularly difficult for intercultural competence assessment to comply with validity standards. It's not so much that the constructs usually measured by intercultural competence tools don't exist, since behaviors like sensitivity, empathy, adaptability, readiness etc. certainly exist, but whether they can be easily identified and measured is a whole different story, and whether they are truly relevant and powerful enough on their own (or even in groups of three or four of them), to allow the claim that they constitute an individual's *whole* intercultural competence ability is very questionable.

Finally, impact (i.e. how the test affects the relationship between individual test-takers, the educational system, and society) and interactiveness (i.e. "the extent and type of involvement of the test-takers' characteristics in accomplishing a test task" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996: 25)), are probably the least considered principles during intercultural competence assessment-making, and this can mean a number of things. It is precisely the impact of intercultural competence (both at a macro and a micro level) and its (lack of) consideration of test-taker's individual backgrounds and circumstances that is the reason behind this paper, and the consequences of not paying them the attention they deserve will be discussed amply in the following sections. The role that intercultural competence assessment plays in a globalized world and the effect it may have on both international and domestic diverse communities has not, to date, been researched sufficiently. Yet, its development and practice are becoming so widespread and trendy, with "intercultural"

becoming a buzzword of sorts, that its implementation is overlooking very important philosophical, historical and moral considerations without taking the necessary time and responsibility before “getting on with it.” In addition, one of the main flaws of intercultural assessment competence, as we will see in section 7, is that it does not take into account the individual characteristics, life experiences and backgrounds of test-takers (Bachman and Palmer, 1996: 111-114), as a result of which it may produce very biased, unfair outcomes. All these issues can result in an extremely careless reshaping of how some groups regard others, or how they regard themselves, and also how they are represented institutionally; and in the long run, this hasty and uncontrolled application of intercultural assessment could potentially have detrimental effects for global justice and human harmony.

5. Intercultural competence as a symbolic system

The ultimate objective behind training in and assessment of intercultural competence is to get interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds on the same page so that undisrupted communicative exchanges may take place. However, is this desire for a lack of disruption fair for all participants involved? For any communicative exchange to be devoid of conflict, there exist two possible scenarios: one, that both interlocutors were already on the same page (i.e. already share the values, opinions and other symbolic systems at hand) or two, that one interlocutor forfeits his/her systems in order to comply (or pretend to comply) with the other interlocutor's in order to keep the exchange undisrupted. Scenario one is likely to occur when the interlocutors come from cultures that share similar systems of symbols and values. In this case, even if not the whole system is shared, at least a high portion of the code is mutually intelligible, which sets a more feasible, democratic and egalitarian ground for negotiation should conflict arise – this, however, merely means that the initial state of

affairs is more favorable, but does not necessarily guarantee a fair, egalitarian and successful exchange. The second scenario, for its part, is a clear example of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998), even when it is disguised and passed on as “adaptation” or “integration.”

Bourdieu and Passeron’s theory of symbolic violence is based on the premise that “every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, adds its own specifically symbolic force to the power relations” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998: 4). Aspiring to train individuals in intercultural competence, or assess where in the process of intercultural competence they are, must necessarily measure the individual’s intercultural skills against a pre-determined selection of skills components and degrees. These selected skills components and the degrees to which they can be attained, are nothing but a cultural arbitrary set by trainers, institutions or scholars, depending on the case at hand. The clearest evidence of this is that no two intercultural competence tools measure the same components or share identical degree scales. Why measuring *these* specific skills instead of *those* others? A cultural arbitrary, especially a dominant one, does not require legitimation – it is just “how things are” or “should be,” and as such, they are eligible to be passed on onto others and perpetuated through time, one exchange at a time, through big or small pedagogic actions:

“All pedagogic action is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power.” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998: 5).

“Pedagogic action is, objectively, symbolic violence first insofar as the power relations between the groups or classes making up a social formation are the basis of the arbitrary power which is the precondition for the establishment of a relation of pedagogic communication.” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998: 6)

In the particular case of the training and assessment of intercultural competence, the cultural arbitraries and arbitrary powers may vary depending on the curricula or test makers and their respective commissioner institutions, but the situation is no different in any sense:

“Pedagogic action is, objectively, symbolic violence in a second sense insofar as the delimitation objectively entailed by the fact of imposing and inculcating certain meanings, treated by selection and by the corresponding exclusion as worthy of being reproduced by pedagogic action, reproduces (in both senses) the arbitrary selection a group or class objectively makes in and through its cultural arbitrary. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998: 8)

This quote and its emphasis on the reproduction of the cultural arbitraries and meanings of only certain groups and classes, but not of others, points out to an uncomfortable notion: that any efforts towards teaching or assessing intercultural competence are, in essence, acts of unidirectional indoctrination. Most existing training and assessment tools are conceived and imbued with Western philosophy, values and ideas; but while some of them aspire to make all humans equal and respectful of each other in the well-intended tradition of the Western Enlightenment, others shamelessly use them as a means to spread very specific ideology or beliefs in an attempt to make such ideology a necessary norm for everyone. An excellent example of this second category could be the Campinha-Bacote intercultural competence model (2005), a model designed for implementation with workers in the area of Healthcare Services that advocates something called "A Biblically-Based Model of Cultural Competence in the Delivery of Healthcare Services," for which the first four lines of descriptors run like this:

- The Bible is the foundation for culturally competent care.
- Absolute 'Truth' exists and it exists is [sic] the contents of God's mind.
- The foundational construct of cultural competence is 'Imago Dei' (image of God).
- Intellectual and moral virtues provide the field of transcultural health care with 'transcultural truth' that is biblically based."

The fact that this framework would surely not be deemed intercultural adequate by many other intercultural competence tools, such as, for example, Byram's Multimodal Model of Intercultural Competence, which is the base for the INCA assessment tool that will be used in section 7 to analyze the utterances of the participants of the study, and which stresses intercultural sub-competences like Respect for Otherness and Empathy, or Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which focuses on Cultural Ethnorelativism with Integration as its goal stage, is yet more evidence of the wide ideological spectrum that can be conveyed through the implementation of intercultural competence.

Regardless of what end of the spectrum a particular intercultural competence framework falls into, the fact that intercultural competence is a very convenient vehicle for the transmission, perpetuation or imposition of ideology, is an unsettling thought. Is it possible at all to aspire to implement it without participating in an act of indoctrination or perpetuating ideological oppression?

6. Intercultural competence as cultural capital in a globalized world

The fact that the world is increasingly globalized poses both concerns and opportunities for the field of intercultural competence. Let us analyze these from the ground up. Why train in and assess intercultural competence in the first place? First of all, cultures have communicated with each other continuously throughout history, arguably with mixed outcomes, and this contact, far from disappearing, is increasing due to globalization. In light of this, it is logical to assume that exchanges are indeed going to happen. However, the lack of experience of individuals and institutions with these delicate encounters puts these

exchanges at risk, and this raises an imperative need for interlocutors to learn how to deal with conflict during these exchanges. Intercultural competence aspires to bridge these gaps between cultures, a bridging act that requires training (theoretical and experimental) in order to succeed. After all, “communication and acceptance are more likely to be strained by offending behaviors and less so by the use of incorrect grammar” (Fantini, 2009: 456). This makes intercultural competence necessary in the exact same way intracultural competence is necessary: “language, behaviors, and interactional strategies together form speech acts when dealing interculturally just as they do within one’s own culture, and all three are needed for intercultural communication” (Fantini, 2009: 456-457). However, intercultural competence is not just the practical expression of communicative abilities (after all, what do you do with a foreign language if not use it within real contexts?), but also the key to understanding and respecting other cultures. An efficient implementation of intercultural competence could be of potential interest to a wide array of collectives and fields. For example, education practitioners and administrators such as professors, researchers, admission officers, relocation officers, international programs managers, and intercultural trainers could greatly benefit from it. In addition, more entrepreneurial and governmental endeavors are also in great need of implementing intercultural competence appropriately, which means intercultural competence could be of relevance for business owners and human resources specialists who have interests abroad or who work at an international level. Political areas such as diplomacy, protocol, international relations, immigration, diversity or border control could potentially (and desirably) also be interested in training interculturally competent professionals. How often do airport workers or immigration enforcers mistake cultural behaviors for defiant attitudes or even criminal tendencies? How can politicians and diplomats learn to communicate better with other politicians and diplomats outside their own countries and deal with domestic diversity? How many times does a new product fail to sell properly due to a lack of understanding with the company’s

offices abroad? By assessing intercultural competence adequately first, and then training all these professionals as required, it would be possible to help them not only become better workers, but also improve their sensitivity, acceptance and understanding with respect to other ethnicities and customs, both within their own countries and communities and abroad. All these opportunities for bettering human relations with each other definitely deserve to be explored, and intercultural competence plays a key role in their proper development. But ah, let us not forget the previous section of this paper: what ideology should these assessments and trainings be imbued in? Could the pedagogic act of teaching or training intercultural competence be considered symbolic violence? This problem can indeed arise when the assessment and training of intercultural competence becomes yet one more instrument of ideological, political and economic oppression within the globalized capitalist world dynamics.

Wallerstein argues that the debate surrounding what culture is, what it represents and how its exchanges should be has historically been framed and dictated within the capitalist world economy which led to globalization (Wallerstein, 1990: 32): “periodically, the capitalist world-economy has seen the need to expand the geographic boundaries of the system as a whole, creating thereby new loci of production to participate in its axial division of labor” (Wallerstein, 1990: 36). He called these repeated processes of expansion and overcoming of local resistance “incorporation,” and points out a contradiction that the populations of each successively incorporated area faced:

“Should the transformations that were occurring in their zone be conceived of as changes from a local and traditional ‘culture’ to a world-wide modern ‘culture’, or were these populations rather simply under pressure to give up their ‘culture’ and adopt that of the Western imperialist power or powers? Was it, that is, a case of modernization or of Westernization?” (Wallerstein, 1990: 36).

This contradiction, however, in practice is not such, since both concepts have come to be one and the same:

“The simple way to resolve this dilemma has been to assert that they are identical. In so far as Asia or Africa ‘Westernizes,’ it ‘modernizes’. That is to say, the simplest solution was to argue that Western culture is in fact universal” (Wallerstein, 1990: 44-45).

What does this mean for intercultural competence? Could its training and assessing possibly be perpetuating the notion that modernization and Westernization are one and the same? Or what is more, that given this cultural universalism, one needs to somehow be “Western” in order to be “modern”? E.g. if you score high in an intercultural competence assessment tool, which are invariably Western-made, your culture is modernized; if not, your culture or society are “falling behind” or are “stuck in their own tribal ways.” Universalism attempts to justify the world system by establishing the notion that every individual and every culture has an equal chance to succeed. In the same way, intercultural training and assessment tools just assume all individuals share equal initial grounds or starting points from which to be trained and assessed, which is indeed not the case, especially taking into consideration that training and tests are created within a specific cultural framework which benefits certain individuals over others. When it comes to assessment especially, the country of origin, class, gender, religion, socioeconomic background and, perhaps most of all, previous intercultural and intergroup experiences of test-takers all affect their performance in this type of assessment, yet neither the frameworks or the tools account for them. The fact is that individuals from Western backgrounds are usually privileged by the existing intercultural competence frameworks, while non-Western individuals can only perform better in training and assessment if they show signs of Western assimilation. This sends the message that, if such individuals do not perform well, it must be because they have not adapted to the universal standards of culture – i.e. “universal” Western culture. Furthermore, in addition to

this assimilation message where one culture swallowing another is presented as desirable, Wallerstein also warns against treating universalist approaches to cultural multiplicity as neutral or free of dangers, since “a universalist message of cultural multiplicity could serve as a justification of educating various groups in their separate ‘cultures’ and hence preparing them for different tasks in the single economy” (Wallerstein, 1990: 45), a notion that echoes Bourdieu’s concept of indoctrination and introduces the role of culture as symbolic capital. The underlying interest and promotion of the benefits of being culturally and/or interculturally competent ultimately point out the value that the different pedagogic authorities place in the knowledge of these skills, thus transforming intercultural competence and its assessment into embodied and institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

The capitalist interest in culture or intercultural abilities lies in the fact that any recognition gained in the form of a cultural capital reward is susceptible to be transformed into economic capital, the link between the two being that it is possible to “establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital. This product of the conversion of cultural capital into economic capital establishes the value, in terms of cultural capital, of the holder of a given qualification relative to other qualification holders” (Bourdieu, 1986: 7). It must be borne in mind, however, that “because the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital, [cultural capital] is predisposed to function as symbolic capital, i.e. to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence [...] as the direct, visible forms of transmission tend to be more strongly censored and controlled” (Bourdieu, 1986: 4-5). In its embodied state, Bourdieu defines cultural capital as “external wealth converted into an integral part of the person” (Bourdieu, 1986: 4). In this sense, cultural capital represents “work on oneself (self-improvement), an effort that presupposes a personal cost” (Bourdieu, 1986: 4) and cannot be delegated onto others; it must be

acquired by each individual who obtains such capital him/herself. In its institutionalized state, cultural capital takes the form of “official” qualifications that legitimize cultural capital in its embodied state. After all, any individual can claim to possess cultural capital, but it is precisely the institutionalized form of cultural capital “what makes the difference between the capital of the autodidact, which may be called into question at any time [...] and the cultural capital academically sanctioned by legally guaranteed qualifications, formally independent of the person of their bearer” (Bourdieu, 1986: 6). Furthermore, “by conferring institutional recognition on the cultural capital possessed by any given agent, the academic qualification also makes it possible to compare qualification holders and even to exchange them” (Bourdieu, 1986: 7). The relevance of Bourdieu’s concepts when it comes to the contextualization of intercultural competence is very clear. The acquisition and mastering of intercultural skills by a physical individual will embody him/her with cultural capital, while certificates in intercultural competence from training courses or from assessment will formally legitimize such embodied cultural capital. One of the big problems in this process lies in the fact that the field of intercultural competence is underdeveloped, and any self-proclaimed “authority” in the matter that presumes to legitimize the intercultural competence of individuals is most likely merely taking advantage of the cultural capital/economic capital relationship in order to obtain plain, direct and lucrative economic capital itself. In other words, the indiscriminate promotion of the idea that being interculturally competent is desirable and, therefore, must be acquired and officially sanctioned by some “expert” authority is really just an indirect way of legitimizing the conversion of cultural capital into economic capital. This is a delicate question that deserves more time and thought than what can be given within the scope of this paper, but it can certainly be deduced from this simple initial reflection that ignoring the cultural capital/economic capital relationship is indeed a dangerous notion that can easily go unnoticed, and any responsible interculturalist should

bear this in mind, asking themselves the following question before implementing intercultural competence or its assessment: Who is filling their pockets from this?

7. Linking theory and practice: Grounding the reality of intercultural competence assessment

This section hopes to act as the necessary bridge between theory and practice within this paper. Using grounded theory, the data collected from 17 participants was analyzed using a combination of an existing tool (the INCA tool) and an ethnographic supplement (interviews) in order to find proof of whether, and to what extent, empirical results support or disprove the theories laid out in the first part of this paper (review section 2 for more information on the methodology employed here). After the participants' responses to the scenarios were open coded, the next stage of the research, axial coding, helped the researcher classify these responses into the four most salient categories of issues arising from the implementation of intercultural competence assessment, namely: 1) Self-reporting, 2) Impact and limitations of the prompts, 3) Assessment of subcategories, and 4) Individual differences in personality and literacy styles. It should be mentioned that, although these issues were observed while testing with the INCA tool, the researcher is confident most intercultural assessment tools would share them, and many would probably even be based on more questionable frameworks than the INCA tool and would most likely raise even more concerns than the ones discussed here. In any case, the following examples and reflections should be considered only a small sample of how the theoretical concerns raised in the previous sections could look like in practice, but by no means should it be understood to be an extensive, complete, or finished analysis of the existing issues and gaps that the assessment of intercultural competence poses at both micro and macro levels. Before proceeding to the next subsections, the researcher suggests that readers familiarize

themselves with the scenarios and rubrics included in the appendix, as they will be referenced repeatedly throughout the following subsections.

7.1 Self-reporting

One of the most controversial features of intercultural competence assessment is that, with few exceptions, it requires individuals to apply self-awareness and self-perception in order to provide a portrayal of their abilities. The INCA tool is no exception, and both the biographical survey and the scenarios are based on the information the participants choose to communicate. The assessors have no means to check the veracity of their statements, and the fact is that, more often than not, individuals are not prepared to provide a large fraction of such data. This is not because participants choose to “cheat” or “lie” on purpose, but most likely because “they may not be able to respond accurately: a major short-coming in studies in the past is that often participants who have little experience in intercultural situations are asked for self-reports of behavioral choices in hypothetical intercultural situations” (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005: 141, in Sinicrope et al., 2007: 28), which often results in discrepancies between the individual’s *perceived* abilities and their *actual* abilities. When using indirect assessment, there is just no way around this problem, which will always taint the data and wrap the results in doubts about whether the information gathered is valid at all. If the researcher or the commissioner of the research are concerned with this issue, they should use direct methods of assessment, like observations in real encounters, but for obvious reasons these are much more difficult to implement. Another option is to consider the subjective nature of indirectly gathered data as *precisely* what makes it valuable for this type of research, and actually focus the research on studying this subjective nature, which is at the core of all cultures and individuals and, therefore, highly relevant during intercultural

communication. Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver (1992, in Garrett-Rucks, 2012: 25) bring up an interesting point:

“It is not surprising that different assessments of the same phenomena produce inconsistent results. However, as mentioned earlier, an understanding of the merits of the different assessments can empower researchers and educators to more accurately interpret results or to choose appropriate assessments for their own research.”

Following what Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver state in the previous quote, the merits of indirect assessment should also be regarded as important in the sense that they help “empower researchers and educators to more accurately interpret results or to choose appropriate assessments.” Pragmatics, as part of a wider discourse analysis, is an especially adequate means to push the assessment of intercultural competence forward in this direction and re-wire research to consider what type of information may be sought after using indirect methods. Since what most assessment tools do, including INCA, is to gather linguistic data produced by subjects and assign different degrees of intercultural development to their utterances, it may seem logical that a method for determining such degrees had been refined by now; however, this is not the case, and the present study proposes critical discourse analysis as an agglutinating agent with certain potential to bring together the different and multidimensional aspects of intercultural assessment.

Discourse analysis analyzes language in use “above or beyond the utterance, focusing on language as meaning in interaction and language in situational and cultural context” (Kecskes, 2014: 229), which would make a perfect match to justify intercultural competence assessment assessors’ judgments of the subject’s utterances, since assessors at present just have to apply their best judgment but do not have to provide reasoning or justification for their assessment marks. Intercultural interactions are social events, and, as Fairclough

puts it, “no real understanding of the social effects of discourse is possible without looking closely at what happens when people talk or write” (Fairclough, 2003: 3). Therefore, a close look at the linguistic utterances produced by participants in the light of what lies beyond them socially and individually is worth exploring and testing. Critical discourse analysis has not been officially applied to the assessment of intercultural competence yet, but the written and oral utterances produced by participants during the assessment process can be analyzed and contextualized just like any other text, and their inconsistencies, subjectivities, and other phenomena could be accounted for this way. Kanik (2013) argues that both discourse completion tasks (DCT) and reverse discourse completion tasks (R-DCT) can be successfully applied to assess intercultural competence in individuals. In this paper, scenarios played an analogous role to that of discourse completion tasks (DCT) by illustrating situations where sociolinguistic, illocutionary and pragmalinguistic skills were employed and by soliciting a reaction from participants. Scenarios are, in fact, just a form of DCT, since their goal is to illustrate the context and the actors in a given situation and allow participants enough creative freedom to resolve the scenario using any intercultural skill or technique at their disposal.

Despite some minor differences, the pragmatics data reflected through both DCTs and scenarios remains the same, since they all “expect the respondent to write an appropriate response after analyzing the sociopragmatic factors implied in the situation prompt. The responses are analyzed by coding them into strategies used to create a speech act” (Kanik, 2013: 626). This shared mechanics is the focus of any study using these kinds of prompts. The prompts include contextual information about the actors of the situation (including the power difference and the social distance between them) and the situation itself (including the reason for the speech act) (Kanik, 2013: 625). Since the respondents must produce utterances to match the given sociocultural context, they are supposed to display, directly

or indirectly, awareness of such sociocultural context at hand, as well as behavioral and attitudinal skills to react to and fit in it, which are key aspects of successfully applied intercultural competence. Both DCTs and scenarios also share the same main challenge, which again relates to the problems arising from using indirect methods. Using elicitation from participants does not produce actual natural data and, therefore, the validity of the results can be questioned at any time (Kanik, 2013: 626). But despite DCTs and scenarios not proving that “a learner can perform speech acts appropriately in a natural situation, it shows the potential and the linguistic formulas a person has and sheds light on his/her sociopragmatic awareness” (Kanik, 2013: 626), and these subjective, attitudinal factors are both valuable and representative of an individual’s intercultural competence in themselves.

As defended by many authors, notably Byram (1997) and Fantini (2009), self-awareness and the ability to question one’s own worldviews is central to intercultural competence. By using self-reporting tasks and scenarios, an expert (the assessor) is able to analyze extensive data for evidence of the development of these aspects in the participants. Self-awareness and awareness of difference, as well as appropriate pragmalinguistics, are life-long skills that individuals progressively acquire and develop, not only to increase their intercultural skills, but also to keep growing at a personal level and as global citizens. I doubt any intercultural practitioner or sociolinguist would question this statement. The problem with self-reporting actually comes when some aspects of intercultural competence are assessed using an indirect method (such as scenarios or DCTs) that relies *exclusively* on the opinions or reactions to fictitious situations by participants as the only basis for grading or assigning a “level” of development. However, adding an ethnographic element such as interviews, can help mitigate the problems associated with this. During an interview, the researcher can question the participants about inconsistencies in their answers, vague responses, or connections between their lives and the item(s) being assessed. Even if this still does not

solve the issue of the data being self-reported (as previously mentioned, the only way to actually eliminate this problem completely would be to use direct research methods), at least it provides a more complex picture of the larger context, personality and experiences of the individual and helps illustrate how the individuals got to be where they are in the spectrum of intercultural ability.

The data analysis conducted during this study was able to solidly ground both the merits and disadvantages of self-reporting during intercultural competence assessment. Let us recap briefly: one of the main advantages of self-reporting is that intention and awareness, two dispositions that heavily influence intercultural encounters, are clearly established. In addition, when scenarios are combined with a biographical survey and interviews, self-reporting can be confronted with the participant's background and life experiences, making it possible for the assessor to find out what exactly in the life story or circumstances of the participant is making him/her react in a certain way in the scenarios. This information could potentially be used later to target groups with similar backgrounds or experiences during training design, so that the resulting training can be meaningful and personalized for that group. In addition, making connections between self-reported reactions and biographical information can help determine whether the participant attained a high (or low) score because the scenarios happened to resonate more deeply (or more shallowly) with them than with other test-takers. Let us look at a practical example of this. One participant in this study displayed a high degree of awareness of different cultural norms (e.g. "Just knowing that your culture and ways of doing things isn't the best or only way of doing things is a great way to be able to form deeper connections with people of different backgrounds," from the survey), and she also showed that she possessed a wide array of strategies to navigate intercultural situations and act as a bridge between cultures (e.g. "I would first ask them how they feel about it. Once they told me about their opinion, I would tell them mine [...]. If my

opinion differed from theirs, that is okay but I hope we could talk about why we each have our opinions while being open-minded,” from scenario 2). This, and most of her utterances throughout the scenarios, would score a high level of intercultural competence by the rubrics of INCA. But what makes her case particularly interesting is that she has never lived, studied or worked abroad, and has only been abroad for short touristic visits, so one may wonder how she acquired her skills in the first place, which according to INCA, are very developed. The survey shed light into this paradox. She is a very active member of the Mosaic Center at her university (UMBC), a branch of student life for culture and diversity at school. For example, they oversee the queer student lounge and the interfaith center. They also engage in communication events and all sorts of culture-related programs as well. During her time at the Mosaic Center, she engages in intercultural exchanges both with her co-workers and with the students for whom the Center organizes events. In this case, self-reporting, in conjunction with the survey, helped the researcher make connections as to what enabled this participant to achieve a high degree of intercultural competence, which could in turn help with future intercultural competence training by designing such training based on what has actually worked for individuals in real life, instead of being based merely on abstract, unproven hypothesis of how and when intercultural competence develops in individuals.

But despite the potential advantages of self-reporting, its issues are difficult to ignore. For example, internal inconsistencies across the responses of a participant in a single test often occur, and, furthermore, participants are usually not aware of being inconsistent. Let us analyze one example from the study. One participant first said in question #1 of scenario 1 that she “would be very understanding of the situation” of the co-worker not calling her, but later, when writing the letter to her family in direct style for question #2, she was more judgmental of the situation and stated that the situation was “kind of bizarre... grocery shopping only takes an hour at most, I’d say,” showing judgment of a given behavior if it

does not happen how she would expect it to happen (i.e. for her, buying groceries taking 1 hour at most would be the “normal” or “acceptable” thing to happen). But this was not an isolated inconsistency, and contradictions were not difficult to spot throughout her responses. For example, she reported not being very involved religiously (she comes from a Hindu and Sikh family), but then, in the church scenario (scenario 4), she stated that “church is something important to my family and me and even though I am out of the country, I will still follow my family’s values.” In addition, in the question of the survey that inquired about how much exposure or contact with other races and ethnicities they had while growing up, she stated both that she “did not have much exposure/contact with other races and ethnicities” while growing up but also that she “had a lot of friends of different races” (both statements were part of the same answer to a single question). Not even the interview could shed light on the “why” of these inconsistencies, as oftentimes the participants did not know themselves why they had answered in different ways. For example, another participant stated in scenario 4 (church scenario) that the character in the story was calling his beliefs “silly” and “not accepting him for who he was.” However, in the same scenario, he also indicated that the character was insisting so much simply because “they really do enjoy my company,” “they may just be that type of person” and “some people are just very assertive. My brother does the exact same thing when we play online.” During the interview, I inquired about why, if he had said that the character was just assertive like his brother because they really enjoyed his company, he also assumed the character was calling his beliefs “silly” and “not accepting him for who he was.” He responded that he was just “trying to keep it laid back,” but “apparently my subconscious chose one of the options” (quotes from the interview).

But the clearest indicator that a participant’s personality and emotional state at the time of testing affects their answers greatly, to the point of saying exactly the opposite about a single

item in a single test, was spotted during the study due to a small logistical misunderstanding. I had asked participants to please forward their surveys and scenarios in a .doc format, but a girl sent me a .pdf first. I asked her if it would be possible to also have the documents in .doc format, as they were easier for me to work with, and she sent them to me in .doc. I expected that the text in both documents would be the same and that only the format would change, but since I had read both, I discovered she had given very different answers to some of the questions, even in the survey, where most of the questions relate to factual data and not do not call for opinions or hypothesizing. For example, to the survey question asking whether she had ever worked or engaged in a joint enterprise or project with members from various cultures, she first answered “No, I have not. I have worked with one person of another race for a project, and that was fine” in one document, and then “Yes, I have through my time at school, group assignments or presentations.” There were some similar instances like this one across the two versions of the documents, the most notable being the answer she gave to the question “In what ways, if any, do you believe learning a foreign language affects how a person sees other cultures?” In the first document, she responded that “I think a person learning a language doesn't necessarily affect a person, it makes them more desirable in the work force but unless they aren't applying it in their daily life such as talking to people then I would say it is just for their personal benefit,” while in the second one, she responded that: “I think that it allows a person to view a culture in a different way, not just linguistically but also through traditions, beliefs and values.” The two answers were radically different and they both had been produced by the participant with barely hours of difference, so no last-minute experience could have possibly altered her opinion or perception of the matter so drastically. I pointed this out to her during the interview, and she said that with the second answer she was “just being nice really,” but that she did not know what had moved her to change her answer into a more politically correct one at the last minute. This is a clear example that reliability standards will always be extremely difficult to meet as long as

intercultural competence assessment uses hypothetical, open questions that rely heavily on self-reporting. But if these factors were to change, then the authenticity, validity and impact of the tests would all be compromised instead. It seems an impossible task to satisfy all six principles of test usefulness when it comes to intercultural competence assessment and the issues derived from self-reporting from which it suffers.

7.2 Impact and limitations of the prompts

The assessment prompts and how they were laid out and presented also played a crucial role in the type of answers and content that was obtained from the participants. Researchers and assessors should be aware of this and select the prompts carefully, as they determine and limit the information that will be obtained and then assessed. In this study, the scenarios and their content were specifically selected to resonate with the participants' experiences, and a conscious effort was made to have a varied pool of situations, characters and questions. This variety was very helpful to see what works well (i.e. provides information relevant to the intercultural abilities of participants) and what does not.

For instance, it turned out that the assessment process may be influenced when participants, unknowingly, determine which specific subcategories of their intercultural competence are more salient in their responses. When a participant's utterances are consistently more focused on some categories over others, some dimensions could potentially not obtain enough data to make the assessment thorough and fair. There is not a straightforward or easy solution to this problem. Assessors can try to design the prompts so that the *expected* utterances for each prompt match a certain category, which this study in fact tried to do: Scenario 1 was designed to obtain mostly data on the participants'

Tolerance of Ambiguity; Scenario 2, on Respect for Otherness; Scenario 3, on Knowledge Discovery; Scenario 4, on Empathy; and Scenario 5, on Behavioral Flexibility. However, it is obvious that most scenarios will obtain data related to the other subcompetences too, which is entirely acceptable, and these utterances should count just as much as the main competence they were designed to test. Making sure that each scenario addresses one category more than others is merely a way of ensuring that instances of all subcompetences are obtained during testing. This can indeed help balance the results, but even when these cautionary measures are taken, and even though the scenarios and questions are the same for all participants, assessors should be aware that how each participant chooses to interpret and answer the prompts may still reflect some dimensions better than others overall. This raises the question of how participants can manipulate and alter (consciously or unconsciously) their own data, and how the representation of all the subcompetences across test takers may be completely different even if they were taking the same test, which once again puts the reliability of the assessment in question and points directly at impact-related issues.

The impact a scenario may have on an individual is definitely one of the factors that alters the score attained for each exercise. Traditionally, most scenario-based tools feature rather low-impact situations. These scenarios mostly deal with daily, non-extreme situations that do not feature sensitive ethical values or controversial issues, which makes them less challenging for participants to ethnorelativize and, therefore, they obtain higher scores without having to apply any special intercultural skills. There were many instances in this study to support this, most notably answers to scenario 1, whose low impact resulted in very few participants expressing awareness that cultural values may be operating in it at all. One of the few exceptions was a girl that stated: "I would ask about the cultural context of this situation. Did this person not call because of a personal characteristic or is it typical in this

society to not need an explanation for such behavior?," but an overwhelming majority of participants universalized the behavior of the character in the story and effectively disconnected it from any cultural-related standards. Some participants universalized the character's behavior under a positive light, since they did not consider the depicted situation was a big deal: e.g. "I wouldn't think to bring this situation up to friends/family unless directly asked because it wouldn't be a big deal to me. People get busy and forget sometimes, and I wouldn't take the situation personally," "I don't know if I would just share a story like this with another colleague because I feel that it might contribute to unnecessary drama," etc. Other participants, for their part, universalized the character's behavior under a negative light, since they reported feeling disappointed at the character's attitude: "Unfortunately, after meeting someone who could speak my language last week, the person never contacted me over the weekend despite us agreeing to hang out, and made up a bad excuse about his mom asking him to go shopping when I saw him at work," "I met a friend from work who can speak English well. He seems nice but I don't know if he is very trustworthy. He told me that he wanted to get together over the weekend, but I never heard anything from him" etc. In either case, however, the participants showed no awareness that there may be a cultural feature operating in this scenario like they did in the rest of the scenarios, and the behavior of the character was instead taken as an individual personal trait, and not as the possible product of a collective cultural conduct.

Another scenario that most participants found low-impact and easy to navigate was scenario 3. All participants, with the only exception of two people, stated that they would still go on the trip that they had previously researched, and many indicated that they trusted their own decisions more than a casual second-hand comment. This matches really well with the Geert Hofstede's associated degrees of values of American society, especially very high

Individualism and Masculinity, and low Uncertainty Avoidance². The only two participants who stated in scenario 3 that they would not be going to the selected country after the friend of a friend's comments gave health and sanitation reasons to not go anymore, since they both suffer from chronic conditions (one is diabetic, and the other one has chronic colitis), so they expressed concern for their conditions worsening in an unknown country. These can be fair reasons not to go to a country after hearing certain comments, and are not very intercultural in nature either. However, the INCA tool would not account for these, and these two participants would score low in the Knowledge Discovery category given that they "Draw on random general knowledge and minimal factual research about other cultures" and that they "Learn by discovery and [are] willing to modify perceptions but not yet systematic" [sic] (INCA rubric for level 1 of Knowledge discovery). Despite being true that they would not be applying further research into the problem posed in the scenario, the truth is that, for them, the issue is not cultural, intercultural or even interpersonal in nature, but health-related. Is it fair not to consider how their backgrounds differ from those of other participants when scoring their responses? Their initial conditions to consider the situation depicted in the scenario are different than that of other participants, yet the tool treats every participant equally regardless of their starting point when confronted with a scenario, since, let us remember, the survey that usually comes with the INCA tool is extremely simplistic, and there is no interview component at all; the individuals' particular circumstances are not accounted for in any way. The researcher of this study was able to find out more about the motivations of these two participants thanks to the added interview, but even if INCA featured interviews, unless the scoring rubric changed, this type of information would not matter during the scoring process.

² <https://geert-hofstede.com/united-states.html>

In any case, these exceptions aside, scenario 3 was definitely of low-impact to U.S. participants' values and the depicted situation posed no conflict for most. However, even more interesting than the expected low-impact answers to low-impact scenarios, are the cases where a fairly low-impact content happened to resonate at a more profound level with some of the participants than with the rest. In a prior study by the same researcher, scenario 5, which puts participants in the situation of having to use the cheek-kissing greeting system of Spain, was employed in the exact form that it features in the present study. Although not customary in the U.S., most participants in both the previous study and in the current one expressed acceptance of the practice or, at least, willingness to adapt to it (e.g. "I don't think the practice is all that wild," "I would go along with whatever the cultural custom is, even if it is uncomfortable," "I would follow whatever greeting is given," etc.); but one participant in the previous study stated that "[...] even though it is custom for women to greet men with a kiss in Spain, I wouldn't be okay with that so I would rather politely say hi and keep my distance." Having conducted surveys and interviews as an ethnographic complement to this previous study as well, the researcher was aware that the participant in question was a Muslim girl, and that her religious beliefs were not allowing her to ethnorelativize this scenario.

Deep beliefs and convictions of any kind (religious, ethical, experiential etc.), are always going to be reflected in the answers of the participants when these beliefs happen to be addressed or challenged in the prompts. Although intercultural assessment tools do not usually feature highly delicate topics, the current study tried to feature some more controversial scenarios (most notably, scenarios 2 and 4), to test how research participants would deal with controversially charged topics, and thus observe how intercultural competence interacts with deeper personal values and attitudes. Using these scenarios really highlighted how little intercultural competence assessment tries to incorporate in its

results the complex ethical, educational and personal backgrounds of the test-takers. Luckily, the supplementary interviews that this study used to provide supplement ethnographical information proved very helpful in discerning patterns across participants' attitudes concerning the impact of the scenarios. Almost invariably, when the participants cared (negatively or positively) about the cultural item or behavior at hand, this minimized the chances of "political correctness" happening, i.e. the participants did not try to respond what they thought was expected of them, and instead were honest about what they really thought/would do in that situation at the expense of rules of politeness or social harmony. Scenario 4, religion-related, was the most salient and consistent example of this. This also proved true the other way around: when the cultural behavior or conflict depicted in the scenario had a low-impact on the participants, their answers invariably showed a higher degree of ethnorelativism; merely because they did not care enough to judge or act on the situation in the first place, like was the case of scenario 2, about bullfighting in Spain, or because the concessions that the situation would require of them were not deemed too demanding to satisfy, as was the case of scenario 5, about greetings in Spain. Unsurprisingly, the participants' responses to scenarios featuring underlying cultural elements about which they had explicitly expressed commitment were more direct, blunt and less carefully "crafted" for the reader (more like their internal monologue than something that someone else would read and rate later) than those that feature elements that were of no particular interest to them, or for which making concessions would pose a big difficulty for them.

Let us ask a problematic question derived from this: should ethnorelativism, systematically and automatically, be rewarded a higher level of competence in assessment in *all* instances? Ethnorelativism is usually considered positive and a sign of a higher level of intercultural competence indeed, but should this mean that skepticism and critical thinking should not be

rewarded in any instance? Let us look into what the participants responded in the greetings (#5), Spanish bullfighting (#2) and Sunday plans (#4) scenarios more closely as an illustration of this issue that was consistent across participants and scenarios.

In scenario #5 (greetings), most participants expressed their wish to adapt to the greeting etiquette of Spain, and most stated that, even if the practice felt awkward at first, it was no big deal for them, and adjusting was more important than how they felt about it. For example, a girl wrote that: "In this situation I would adjust to the customs in Spain [...]. Respecting cultural traditions is more important than my comfort or opinion of a cultural behavior. If it is regarded as rude, of course I will show respect to the people and Spain's culture." It seems that, here, she is comparing being disrespectful with not engaging in the (remember, *arbitrary*) cultural norm that is most widespread in a geographical location (Spain) different from hers (the US), and also, that this cultural norm is more important than any individual feeling or opinion she may have on the matter. However, how real or genuine is this desire to engage in such a norm? Later in the same scenario, she stated that "I hope they don't take this surprise as my refusal or dislike for the greeting because this is not my intention. [...] I hope I can give the impression that I accept and will participate in traditional greetings and Spanish culture." Let us look closely at her word choice: she hopes to "*give the impression*" that she accepts and will participate in the culture. In other words, this could imply that *actually* accepting or participating in the culture is not as important as the superficial *impression* of acceptance and participation. Should this be deemed interculturally competent? According to the INCA tool, yes, and at a high degree too. I was curious as to what she would think if the situation was in the reverse, i.e. she was in the host country and someone else came to her geographical location, so I asked her the following question during our interview: "Since immigrant services and justice are causes important to you [as stated by herself in the survey], do you believe immigrants should adapt to the US ways of

doing things, like you said you'd do in scenario 5 if you went abroad?" She responded "I think it's important to *learn social skills* in order to *survive* in the US; I mean *social survival*. So obviously it's up to them, but if they want to survive in American contexts they should at least consider it and try it, but it doesn't mean they have to be completely 'American', they can also still retain *parts* of their other culture" [emphasis added here]. Bourdieu and Passeron's theory of symbolic violence is terribly relevant here. Looked under this light, it is clear that this girl believes, understands and accepts that there is a dominant cultural norm at play that must be respected, and that any minority culture that hopes to "survive" surrounded by that dominant culture must adapt, or they may risk perishing or "not surviving" socially. The girl never considered the arbitrary nature of the cultures or thought to question them, as this may have been her *opinion* or *judgment* and, as she expressed herself, "respecting cultural traditions is more important than my comfort or opinion of a cultural behavior." Obviously, the INCA tool agrees with this premise, and her utterances in scenario 5 would have been awarded a level three of intercultural competence, making it impossible for any questioning or judgment of a cultural practice itself (be it greetings, wedding traditions or even female genital mutilation?) without risking a lower level. Although the researcher recognizes that willingness to adapt to other cultures can be a sign of high intercultural competence indeed, the present study questions whether the *motives* behind this willingness should not be questioned, including the perpetuation of hierarchical relationships (e.g. the host culture must be respected by the "guest" or minority cultures and be regarded as dominant over them) and the obliviousness by intercultural interlocutors to the arbitrariness of any cultural practice or tradition. The results obtained from scenario #2, featuring bullfighting in Spain, supported these concerns and took them even further.

For many, including a very high percentage of the Spanish population, bullfighting is seen as a barbaric, obsolete tradition that should be stopped, while some still regard it as a

“national sport” or a “national form of art.” Including a scenario featuring an ambiguous situation depicting a Spaniard whose opinion on the matter is unknown was intended to entice the participants’ opinion on such a colorful and polemic practice, and as a researcher I expected to find at least a significant percentage of participants whose respect and empathy for animals and animal rights would make them react strongly to the practice. However, the actual results were fairly surprising. Except for only one exception, the rest of participants did not seem to care much one way or the other about the practice, and many stated explicitly that, since it was not part of their own culture, they had no right (or interest) to judge or express an opinion on the matter. In fact, despite the fact that the scenario does not explicitly state whether the character in the scenario is for or against bullfighting, most participants just assumed he/she was pro, and their responses were based on that assumption, e.g. “I would have probably known that he saw bullfighting as a form of art before we became close friends since it is part of his culture.” However, even one of the very few participants who expressed that they thought the tradition was cruel, also stated that he did not care enough about it to make a big deal out of it: e.g. “Q2: ‘You don’t see the Romans still fighting lions in their coliseum. Even you have to admit, paying to watch a man and a bull try to kill each other is rather barbaric’. Q3: No, not really. I don’t have a strong enough opinion on the matter for it to affect my opinion of a person.” Another boy pointed out something similar regarding bullfighting not being part of his culture, and therefore, not his problem to address: “I would think that this is an issue for the citizens of Spain to address and not myself, so I do not think it is a problem for me to have an opinion on in the first place.” But the peak of my surprise came with the case of a girl that had listed “animal rights” as a cause that was important to her in the survey, yet she stated in the scenario that she would not wish to offer her opinion on the matter in that situation unless asked and preferred to not risk upsetting the other person. During the interview, when I reminded her that she had listed “animal rights” as a cause that was important to her in the survey, she said that,

even though the cause was important to her, she would still not get into an argument and would not want to do anything to offend her friends abroad in the fear of damaging her relationships abroad. When I inquired if the situation would change if, hypothetically, bullfighting happened to be a U.S. tradition, she said that she would be more outspoken in that case, because in that case she would be able to do her own research, form her own opinion and be more of an advocate for the cause in her home country, but not while abroad. I then asked her if she could perhaps do that kind of research while abroad too, and she responded that she wouldn't have the same resources (books, internet, knowledgeable people) to do her own research abroad the same as in the U.S., and that even if she did, she'd still not want to damage her relationships abroad in the fear of being alone there, and preferred feeling more stable and confident in that new environment where she didn't know that much about the culture surrounding her.

This fear of the unknown, encumbrance of social harmony and political correctness that would prevent this girl from not just expressing her opinions about other culture, but also not even doing research on a controversial practice, as well as the attitude of most participants considering their opinion had no place in a matter that did not concern their own culture, was shared one way or another by all the participants. There was, however, one participant in the study who was outspoken about his opinion about this practice. Interestingly, most participants have only had very limited experiences abroad or none at all, and their foreign language skills are also very limited, while the participant who was outspoken about animal rights has travelled very extensively, lived abroad, had immersion experiences in all sorts of communities abroad and speaks several languages fluently. His confidence in knowing what bullfighting was exactly about showed in this answer to the scenario:

“There are several stages of the *corrida de toros* and the matador doesn't come with the sword until the end. By that point the bull has already had several lances impaled into its back so that it is slow enough for the matador to dodge him. If people want to see it, find a way to make the animal not suffer so greatly.”

However, despite his confidence in knowing how the practice works, which is probably why he was not afraid or hesitant to offer his opinion, he also, just like everybody else in the study, ethnorelativized the situation based on the interest the practice may have for other people:

“It would be a shame to abolish an entertaining cultural tradition. People should be made more aware of the full process and then let the market decide. If people don't want to see it after that, then it will fail anyway.”

So, despite having a much higher degree of knowledge and intercultural experience, the underlying consideration of the intercultural practice by this participant was very similar to that of the rest of participants, only presented in a more informed, assertive manner. When taking scoring in consideration, the fact is that the INCA tool would award intermediate to high levels of competence in areas like Tolerance of Ambiguity, Empathy and Behavioral Flexibility to all of the participants who chose to stay away from expressing their opinion in this scenario on the basis of social harmony or because they did not wish to judge the practices of other cultures. However, interestingly, the INCA tool would also punish the lack of active research in finding out more about the practice and what it is about, and this would reflect in low scores of Knowledge Discovery for those admitting not knowing much about the practice and not being very interested in it. What would have happened, however, if this scenario had obtained well-structured, coherent criticism from participants on the basis of defense of animal rights? It was not the case of this study, but if it had been, should participants have been marked down for ethnocentric attitudes? Questioning cultures, both

one's own and others, is key to truly understanding them, and punishing well-reasoned, reasonable critical thinking would only contribute to fostering herd mentality instead of active attitudes that could potentially engage in intercultural activism and critical cross-cultural dialogue. In any case, as things currently stand and as supported by the data, the totality of the participants considered in one way or another that, if a cultural practice is not their own and they do not have strong feelings about it one way or the other, ethnorelativizing proves quite easy to exercise no matter how controversial the practice may be elsewhere. Was there an opposite example that stood out in the data analysis? That is, a scenario that reflected a practice that would be considered low-impact in another culture, but that proved very difficult for participants in this particular study to ethnorelativize? Yes.

Considering how participants reacted to the religious (or more like, unreligious) scenario #4, it can be solidly construed that religion is a very sensitive topic in the U.S. that bears high impact for most individuals. A small percentage of the participants of the study just regarded the character in the scenario as being either very insistent or interested in their company (e.g. "I think they insisted so much because that is how some people are. They want you to go out and have fun," "they really value my company and want to hang out," "Friends normally try to convince each other to change their plans in order to hangout, or at least it's common in my friend group" etc.), but, on the other hand, the fact is that a vast majority of participants used very strong wording to refer to how they regarded the fictitious character's behavior. Some of the impressions the participants had for the fictitious character in the scenario were that he/she was "putting down my religious beliefs and basically calling me stupid for having faith," "it's a little offensive to belittle someone else's religious beliefs and call them silly," "they either think that what I believe is silly or they feel bad that they themselves are not going to church on Sunday," "I think my friend is being a tad self-centered," "these friends are so dismissive of my faith," "they crossed a line in trying to

persuade me to go by passively attacking my beliefs and the notion of attending church [...] they don't respect my beliefs or priorities as much as their wishes. They ignored my beliefs and even mocked them to make me do what they wanted," and the list goes on.

What is interesting is that this vast majority of participants felt this way and employed this type of wording regardless of whether they had stated in the survey that they were religious themselves or not, and some of these statements come from non-religious participants who were just "getting into the role" of being religious for the sake of the scenario. It was clear that the participants were transferring sociopragmatic rules of American English and culture to the quote of the Spanish fictitious character. Unlike cases where linguistic mishaps occur, when sociopragmatic mishaps take place, they are not clearly attributed to the pragmatics and social appropriateness of the other culture by interlocutors, but more to character traits—in this case, "mocking, dismissive, rude, offensive, self-centered, attacking" etc. (Nguyen, 2013, in Loewen, 2015: 128). The acquisition of pragmatics and sociopragmatics is one of the latest aspects of foreign language and interculturality that are learned, and despite language not being a problem in the scenarios, since the whole study was conducted in English, participants applied their own sociopragmatics to the situation, regardless of the clearly specified Spanish context of the scenario. By all accounts, scenario #4 was being judged by different standards than all the other scenarios by most participants. Perhaps because, for the rest of scenarios, American sociopragmatics happened to mostly coincide with Spanish pragmatics for those given situations, this issue did not arise as much in the other scenarios, but scenario #4 somehow managed to bring up a case where they don't, and thus intercultural conflict was served.

Even for those participants who showed a high degree of ethnorelativism in other scenarios, the explicit expression of religious disbelief in scenario #4 was not ethnorelativized as much

or at all, in contrast with the high degree of tolerance of other behaviors or opinions presented in all the other scenarios. Furthermore, even those participants who showed explicit understanding that different norms or codes were at play in this particular scenario, seemed to take their own intercultural reflections into account less than in other scenarios when making a judgment of the situation. For example, a girl showed awareness of difference by stating first that: "My friends may be insistent because they are not accustomed to going to church. Maybe they didn't grow up that way and don't understand the importance church may have for others. They just don't have the same perspective as me and that's okay," only to add straight away that "but I wish they wouldn't *try to make me feel bad* about going [...] If they *continue to be close-minded and not respect my preferences and ways of doing things*, then I would probably not continue a friendship with them" [emphasis added here to signal assumptions not based on anything mentioned in the scenario]. Why would this girl think that the character was trying to make her feel bad, being closed-minded and not respecting her preferences and ways of doing things based solely on such a small and vague statement as the one in the scenario, even after she had admitted herself the person may just be used to doing something different than herself and "that is okay"? There definitely seemed to be something in this scenario that made it very difficult for participants, religious or not themselves, to show the same tolerance and empathy that they exhibited in the rest of scenarios. While almost the totality of participants had no trouble accepting a different cultural norm that existed in their conscious mind (e.g. in scenario #5, they were aware beforehand of how the greeting etiquette worked in Spain exactly), they had trouble with those implicit or "below the iceberg" cultural rules that they did not know explicitly (e.g. how Spaniards may express religious disbelief, the fact that this does not have to constitute an attack on the beliefs of others, and how insistence with a friend is generally a sign of appreciation of that person's company). The interviews shed some light into this.

During the interview, I asked most participants who had deemed the character “mocking” or “disrespectful” what part of the scenario exactly made them feel the character was belittling their beliefs (for each participant, I used the same wording in my question they had used in their answer to the scenario). Almost invariably, they referred to the quoted part of the scenario: “Oh, come on, why do you prefer to go to church? It’s boring! It’s not even proven that there exists a God anyway. Join us for lunch instead, it’s a much better plan!” But what is in this quote really? Is it reasonable or fair to deduce from this quote alone that the character is *really* “trying to make the other person feel bad about their beliefs” or “mocking and calling their beliefs stupid”? This scenario was certainly designed to have a higher impact than, say, scenario #1 for example, but at the same time, authenticity was very much taken into account. Even though there exist exceptions, the truth is that, except for older generations (i.e. grandparents), most Spaniards do not go to church on Sundays anymore, and this is the dominant cultural practice nowadays. Instead, eating and drinking together is the preferred social event, and insistence on friends using any means possible to make others join a plan is common practice.

In the U.S., sensitivity and reverence to personal religious beliefs is ever-present, and any explicit expression of belief would never be taken as a personal attack by a believer of another faith or a non-believer. For example, let us say that the quote and the situation had been different in the scenario, and depicted the opposite insistence: e.g. “Oh, come on, why don’t you join us for mass this one time? It’s very enriching! You’ll see how much joy you’ll feel when you let Jesus enter your heart. Join us instead of going for lunch to that restaurant, it’s a much better plan!” I doubt any participant would have expressed that the fictitious character in this case was “mocking,” “belittling” or “being dismissive” of the faiths of others (or lack thereof) just because they are expressing their own faith and inviting the other person to change plans to join them in another activity. That is exactly what the character of

the original scenario was doing, too. He/She was certainly expressing that they themselves did not believe in God, but that open opinion was taken as a direct attack on other people's beliefs. It can solidly be deduced by the data obtained during the research coding process that explicit expression of belief is socially acceptable in the US, but the explicit expression of unbelief may be interpreted as an attack on the beliefs of others. In fact, during two of the interviews, two girls who are themselves not religious expressed how much they feel their lack of faith was put under scrutiny in the US, and that they felt this was also in contrast with other countries. When examining this in light of Bourdieu's symbolic violence, this underlying arbitrary cultural norm has as weak a foundation as any other, but the fact remains: the expression of belief is a dominant cultural feature of American society, while expressing unbelief could be regarded as an "attack" on this dominant cultural norm and therefore is deemed unacceptable.

As far as the grading by the INCA tool is concerned, the fact is that strong vocabulary and the expression of one-sided cultural behaviors is not rewarded. For instance, utterances like the ones quoted before would certainly score low in Tolerance of Ambiguity, Respect for Otherness, Empathy and Behavioral Flexibility. As it was mentioned before, the tool rewards ethnorelativism, and these utterances are clearly ethnocentric. But, what would happen in cases like the girl who expressed both awareness and ethnorelativism, and ethnocentrism in the same question? Let us review it again:

"My friends may be insistent because they are not accustomed to going to church. Maybe they didn't grow up that way and don't understand the importance church may have for others. They just don't have the same perspective as me and that's okay, but I wish they wouldn't try to make me feel bad about going [...] If they continue to be close-minded and not respect my preferences and ways of doing things, then I would probably not continue a friendship with them."

These utterances would score both low and medium levels of Tolerance of Ambiguity, Respect for Otherness, Empathy and Behavioral Flexibility. Having the same intervention span across two or all three levels of intercultural competence as evaluated by the tool is an indicator of the stage of development and the intrinsic complexity of the participant's intercultural attitudes, but these nuances are lost in the final results, since only the total level achieved would be shared with the participants themselves or the commissioner of the test (see the following section 7.3 for more details on this type of issues). This is unfortunate, because certainly a participant who shows instances of awareness and moving towards understanding other ways of conceiving the world in one or more categories, even if they are still caught up in their own ways, is not the same as a participant that only does the latter but not the former. However, because of how the rubrics are designed, they may get the same score overall once the points from all scenarios have been added up.

In sum, it is clear that calibrating the impact of the prompts meaningfully for each test implementation, reducing their content limitations, and balancing ethnorelativism with critical thinking are definitely complex matters that have no easy solution as far as assessment or training are concerned. It's impossible to address *every* possible cause or element that matters and applies to *each one* of the test-takers, and since a test will only assess a limited number of scenarios or situations per examination event, maybe those participants who happen not to have strong feelings or opinions on the events depicted in a given test will score higher than those who do on that particular testing occasion, since they would be able to ethnorelativize more easily. However, if the chosen prompts had been different for that particular examination, maybe their results would have come up completely different and the scores for many would be completely reversed...

7.3 Assessment of subcategories: “A disjointed list of attributes”

Despite some theoretical claims that measurable objectives and the assessment of component parts is the more appropriate approach to measure intercultural competence (see section 4 for more details), let us not forget the criticism that these subcomponents may just become a “disjointed list of attributes” (Deardorff, 2006: 253). The subcomponents of the INCA rubric are coherent, but underdeveloped and not completely cohesive at times. The rubric provides very brief descriptions of each level of attainment for each subcomponent, and oftentimes the descriptions from one level to the next can seem unrelated, instead of pertaining to the same category, since there isn’t a clear connection or key words used across the three levels. For example, let us look at the three levels of Empathy:

1E Tends to see the cultural foreigner’s differences as curious, and remains confused about the seemingly strange behaviors and their antecedents. Nonetheless tries to ‘make allowances’.	2E Has the beginnings of a mental checklist of how others may perceive, feel and respond differently to, a range of routine circumstances. Tends increasingly to see things intuitively from the other’s point of view.	3E Accepts the other as a coherent individual. Enlists role-taking and de-centering skills, and awareness of different perspectives, in optimizing job-related communication/ interaction with the cultural foreigner.
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The descriptions for all the three levels are coherent enough to not seem completely detached from each other, but there is not a common connecting theme across the three descriptions that can help the assessor differentiate clearly between the levels of observed Empathy behaviors in the test-taker’s utterances. In addition, an assessor could well confuse the descriptors for Empathy with the ones for Respect of Otherness:

1R Is not always aware of difference and, when it is recognized, may not be able to defer evaluative judgment as	2R Accepts the other’s values, norms and behaviors in everyday situations as neither good nor bad, provided	3R Out of respect for diversity in value systems, applies critical knowledge of such systems to ensure equal
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good or bad. Where it is fully appreciated, adopts a tolerant stance and tries to adapt to low-involving demands of the foreign culture.	that basic assumptions of his own culture have not been violated. Is motivated to put others at ease and avoid giving offence.	treatment of people. Is able to cope tactfully with the ethical problems raised by personally unacceptable features of otherness.
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The fact is, there doesn't seem to be anything that is idiosyncratic of each category (Empathy vs Respect of Otherness), as both seem to deal with the same vague notions across their three levels: difference is not recognized or recognized only as curious or strange, and judgments may be made (levels 1), the test-taker starts to see things from the eyes of the other (levels 2), the test-taker is fully aware of difference and is able to manage different intercultural points of view with no judgment (levels 3). There is also an internal problem within the Assessor Manual related to the denominations of different testing elements, as the same concepts are not always called the same, and this is confusing. For example, in some points of the Manual, "dimensions" sometimes refer to one of the 6 *subcompetences*, but at other times to the *strands* (i.e. the grouping of two of those subcompetences); in the same way, "exercise" sometimes seems to mean an *activity* within a section of a test, while elsewhere it refers to a *section* of the test, or even to the *test* as a whole. In addition, "test" seems to be used interchangeably with "exercises," which means that "tests" can also then refer to *activities* within a section of test, a *section* of the test, or the *test* as a whole. Finally, it is likewise unclear if "category" is used to refer to the different *sections* of the test (i.e. scenarios, roleplay etc.), to the six *subcompetences*, or to the three *levels/degrees* of attainment (i.e. basic, intermediate, full). Despite having a glossary at the end of the Manual, these problems are not clarified, and since they are such important and frequent elements within the Manual, but at other times to the *strands* (i.e. the grouping of two of those subcompetences); in the same way, "exercise" sometimes seems to mean an *activity* within a section of a test, while elsewhere it refers to a *section* of the test, or even to the *test* as a whole. In addition, "test" seems to be used interchangeably with "exercises," which means that "tests" can also then refer to *activities* within a section of test, a *section* of the test, or

the *test* as a whole. Finally, it is likewise unclear if “category” is used to refer to the different *sections* of the test (i.e. scenarios, roleplay etc.), to the six *subcompetences*, or to the three *levels/degrees* of attainment (i.e. basic, intermediate, full). Despite having a glossary at the end of the Manual, these problems are not clarified, and since they are such important and frequent elements within the Manual, this entanglement makes understanding and applying the Assessor’s guidelines more challenging and vague.

Despite all of this, it should be mentioned that there is no guarantee that the assessment process would be devoid of problems in the case of intercultural competence tools that assess holistically. Assessing holistically a complex and multifaceted construct like intercultural competence adds to the criticism that its definition and assessment are too indistinct and vague and once more leaves unanswered the questions of “what does being interculturally competent *entail*” and “what can an interculturally competent individual *do*,” so it seems there is no perfect solution to this dilemma, and both options, assessing subcategories or assessing holistically, will always have their advantages and disadvantages when it comes to intercultural competence assessment. But, for the moment, let us look at what the analysis of the participants’ utterances in this particular study revealed about the assessment of subcategories.

While coding the data and evaluating which level of intercultural competence the participants’ utterances would attain for each subcategory of the INCA tool, it was not uncommon that the participants’ utterances could fit two or more categories at once, something that the INCA tool itself acknowledges: “A certain kind of observation may even indicate full competence in one dimension and at the same time only basic competence in another dimension” (INCA, 2004: 15). This can make things even more complicated in cases where different levels would be awarded when evaluated under different lights. Let us

analyze some examples. In the church scenario, a girl stated that “I think they crossed a line in trying to persuade me to go by passively attacking my beliefs and the notion of attending church, but I believe they had good intentions.” First of all, should the assessor understand this utterance as a reflection of the participant’s Tolerance of Ambiguity, Respect for Otherness, or Empathy? On the one hand, the participant did not give any indication that she was aware of any cultural circumstances and norms that governed the scenario, and when faced with ambiguity related to these hidden norms, she just jumped to the conclusion that her beliefs and practices were being attacked. This is an indicator that would fall in the INCA rubric under the section of Tolerance of Ambiguity, but since she could not identify the possible ambiguities in the scenario and reacted based on limited information assumptions, she would only score a level one. However, the utterance could also fall under the category of Respect for Otherness, since the utterance shows clear signs of ethnocentrism, i.e. the participant, unknowingly, is being judgmental of a cultural system she is not very familiar with by using her own culture as the filter for an intercultural situation. She would also score one in this category of the rubric. Finally, the utterance could be related to a level two of Empathy as well, since the participant is trying to “see things intuitively from the other’s point of view” (INCA rubric for Empathy, level two), and demonstrated this by saying: “I believe they had good intentions.” In cases like this, therefore, which category should prevail over the others: Tolerance of Ambiguity, Respect for Otherness or Empathy? Is the level two in Empathy more important than the level one in Tolerance of Ambiguity and Respect for Otherness, or are they all equally relevant? Does it not matter that the test-taker is taking initial steps towards a more decentered attitude, since the utterance reflects mixed levels of competence? In practice, the resolution of these ambivalences across categories is pretty much resolved at the assessor’s discretion, who ultimately has in his/her hands the power to choose which category to assign the utterance to, or assigning it to all of them. Interestingly, although the latter may seem like a good solution that takes all of the

dimensions into account, at the same time, it would force test-makers to admit that, after all the trouble of trying to categorize and theorize intercultural competence, the reality is that this skill is so complex, and the categories overlap so much, that it could well happen that a single utterance could reflect intercultural competence in some areas and intercultural incompetence in others at the same time (!), so why bother with it in the first place. The fact is that the more categories tested at once, the more overlapping occurs, which once more, relates to the widely-referenced criticism that intercultural competence is always either presented in too broad a manner or, as is the case here, as a “disjointed list of attributes” (Deardorff, 2006: 253).

Related to this, there is another important criticism that derives from assessing subcategories: that the final score attained by test-takers does not reflect the fact that their intercultural competence is nuanced and under development. A participant’s total number of utterances for a single category can easily span across all levels, which is an indicator of their stage of development and the intrinsic complexity of their intercultural attitudes, but this is not accounted for in the final score report, and significant nuances in the participants’ utterances are lost. Let us take the utterances related to Empathy of a specific participant as an example. Most of the utterances of this participant in question that related to Empathy scored at a level three according to the INCA rubric, as the participant took into account the other person’s feelings and system of values, and was also able to deal tactfully and appropriately with them. One of the most skilful and detailed examples he offered was part of the bullfighting scenario, where he stated that:

“I think that the tradition is important but if the animal is to be killed, it should not be done in such a slow, painful manner. There are several stages of the *corrida de toros* and the *matador* doesn’t come with the sword until the end. By that point the bull has already had several lances impaled into its back so that it is slow enough for the matador to dodge him. If people want to see it, find a

way to make the animal not suffer so greatly. It would be a shame to abolish an entertaining cultural tradition. People should be made more aware of the full process and then let the market decide. If people don't want to see it after that, then it will fail anyway."

To deal with such a delicate topic, he first showed his understanding of the practice by explaining what happens during a bullfight, and only then did he tackle his opinion on the matter ("it should not be done in such a slow, painful manner"), but immediately also accounted for those who cherish the practice as a tradition ("it would be a shame to abolish an entertaining cultural tradition"). This representation of both sides of the argument, as well as proposing how to deal with the conundrum by setting a hypothetical situation where the outcome is more desirable and better handled than the one presented in the scenario ("find a way to make the animal not suffer so greatly") was certainly rewarded by the INCA rubric, and would score a level three with flying colors. This participant offered similar approaches in other scenarios too, and would have also obtained a level three in Empathy in them. However, the participant's Empathy approach to the church scenario was somewhat different.

In the question where he was asked whether his relationship with his friend would change in any way after the conversation, he stated that he hoped that "he/she refrains from making such statements in the future." Although probably unintentional, the participant here showed a wish to not let the person from the other culture speak their mind or give their opinion freely and to refrain from behaving in the way they would usually behave in order to adapt to what he, the test-taker, considers acceptable. This would certainly not score a level three in Empathy, as the rest of his assessment would. Despite this same participant offering many excellent examples of possible collaborations between himself and all the other characters involved in the rest of scenarios, there were no instances of concessions or efforts to cooperate or engage in dialogue in this particular scenario, as well as no indication that the

participant was aware that cultural norms different from his own applied in it. So, with all the utterances deriving from the same testing event, and coming from the same test-taker who displayed great Empathy skills in all the other scenarios, would it be accurate to say that, by the standards of the INCA assessment, he is a highly Empathic person, despite not having fully displayed his abilities in one scenario? Or that, since he did not apply in one scenario the same skills he applied in the rest, the merit of the other high-Empathy utterances should not be taken as fully representative of his abilities as it may seem? In the end, these nuances would just be reduced to a single number per category, and be effectively lost and not communicated to either the test-taker or the test commissioners. Here is why.

During the usual grading process, each utterance that has been assigned to a given subcompetence would join other utterances in this same subcompetence section, some of which could have been assessed a basic level, others intermediate, and others full, for a total pool of utterances that would span across all three levels within a single subcompetence. Then, the assessor has to assign a single level to the whole subcompetence, and then do the same for the pair of two subcompetences that make up the strand. In the end, a final level would be produced for each strand, and that is the information that will reach the test-taker or any other party interested in the test-taker's performance: a final level (basic, intermediate or full) for each strand (i.e. a combination of two categories) that does not reflect the multidimensional aspect of some of the utterances produced during the assessment process, nor the existence of utterances at different levels. This progressive reduction of details thus turns complex, nuanced intercultural abilities into a flat, uniform result that fails to reflect reality accurately. Ironically, the INCA tool itself includes the following statement in its own Assessor's Manual: "Scores cannot be regarded as a reliable guide to the intercultural competence of an individual" (INCA, 2004: 23). Part of the reason for this affirmation is that "it should be emphasized that the tests are a training

tool, allowing discussion of working examples of intercultural competence in practice” (INCA, 2004: 23). Despite this justification, it is nonetheless quite bizarre that the same tool that has been designed to measure intercultural competence includes this sort of disclaimer with such a contradictory message. If the tool, according to the tool itself, cannot be regarded as a reliable source to attest the intercultural competence level of an individual, why design it as an assessment tool in the first place (instead of a training or reflection resource, for example)? This also raises another important question – even if the tool were considered merely a training resource to increase the intercultural competence of individuals, how could we be sure that such training is successful? If said training tool would indeed claim to *increase* intercultural competence in individuals, this would then mean that an individual's level of intercultural competence *can* increase or decrease. In other words: it would mean that it *can* indeed be quantified, and, therefore... *measured*.

7.4 Individual differences in personality and literacy styles

Differences between the participants' communication styles and personalities when reacting to the prompts can also have an impact on their assessment, sometimes regardless of their actual level of intercultural competence, since the assessor simply does not have enough evidence to support his/her decisions in all instances. For example, the number of words used by the participants to respond can be an important factor in determining their level. Though not infallible, it is usually the case that the more words and utterances a participant produces, the higher the level attained usually is, something that the INCA's Assessor Manual acknowledges: “longer and more detailed answers will tend to score more highly in some cases” (INCA, 2004: 23). Providing reasoning or justification to support utterances helps the assessor enormously in identifying the stage of development of intercultural

attitudes, as well as where the participant's train of thought is coming from and whether they are currently developing their intercultural abilities through activities and exposure or not. For example, let us examine this extensive answer of a participant to the church scenario:

"I am not religious, so this specific issue wouldn't come up on my end. However, if I were to have a firm belief in something, then my decision would depend on the details of the given scenario. Would anything bad happen if I were to skip a day? Would it become a habit to skip out on this important (to me) event? Are there going to be more opportunities to hang out with my new friends? If this is the only chance I get to see my friends then I would likely skip church (or whatever event I am concerned about). I would just be careful to not make a habit out of neglecting other responsibilities in lieu of a social life. However, it is also important to not neglect the social aspect of your life for other aspects. There needs to be a balance."

This participant is providing the assessor with the information needed to see where his observations and speculations are coming from, which allows the assessor to grant him a higher level of intercultural competence, since she has been able to *show* a wide array of intercultural skills: e.g. there is an ethnorelativistic reasoning behind his assertions (Respect for Otherness), he is aware of possible differences that could alter the context where the situation is taking place (Empathy), and indicates that he understands that the frame could be seen and read in more than one way (Tolerance of Ambiguity). In other words, he *demonstrates* where his statements and mental processes are coming from, and thus provides the assessor with sufficient evidence of his abilities.

On the other side of the spectrum, however, when an assertion is not properly or sufficiently justified, the assessor would probably have no option but to grant a lower level of intercultural competence out of cautiousness, as was the case of the following utterance of another participant to the greetings scenario:

"I would stick to situations where I am introduced to other people not personally, but as part of a group so that I can avoid this awkward one on one interaction."

And also the case of this answer to the question "Would your relationship with your friend change in any way after this conversation? If so, why and in what ways would it change?" in the bullfighting scenario:

"No, my relationship would not change"

In both examples, since it is impossible to guess what made the participants judge the situations as such, and there is no alternative but to deem that they simply do not possess enough awareness or intercultural skills to manage the situation differently. The first utterance immediately gives the impression of being ethnocentric, but the truth is, the assessor has no idea what could be behind it, which could bear an important weight on it: Past experiences? Conservative upbringing? Religious motives? Germophobe? After all, for example, being a germophobe should not be considered ethnocentric or necessarily interculturally incompetent, should it? This reasoning is also true for the second utterance, where simply stating that your relationship with a person whose opinions differ from yours wouldn't change does not provide enough evidence of high intercultural abilities.

This issue applied to many instances during the data analysis process, and it is truly unfortunate that a mere lack of indicators could bring down the final level of competence of an individual whose actual attitudes and actions could perhaps correspond to a higher level – after all, that something does not show at a certain moment in time does not necessarily mean that it is not there or that it would not show in other instances. In any case, there is no easy solution to this. Maybe a mandatory word count could be set for each scenario? The problem with this, however, would be the fact that, if a participant chooses to willingly comply

with Grice's maxims for collaboration (Kecskes, 2014), this is *in itself* an intercultural and interpersonal competence indicator, so, if a mandatory word count was set, would the results reflect fairly or accurately the actual attitudes of the participant, or would they just be a reflection of the test mandatory rules? In addition, individual personality could well be playing a role here as well. A shy person will always react differently than an outgoing person in a scenario that requires physical contact, defending one's opinion, confronting friends or talking to strangers, for example, and this has an impact in intracultural relationships just as much as in intercultural ones, so we could make the statement that not all behaviors are a reflection of intercultural competence alone, since conflict raised by different approaches to physical contact, defending one's opinion, confronting friends or talking to strangers happens within cultures all the time too. What if the participant who refused to kiss as a greeting also avoids any kind of one-on-one interaction in his own culture too? The assessor simply does not have enough information to make a fair and complete assessment but *has* to in order to produce a score for the test anyway.

And what happens in we take into account not only individual differences, but also collective differences? For example, in a collective society or a society with a strong sense of face or hierarchical values (e.g. to one's elders or superiors), scenario #3 would have certainly obtained less high scores from the INCA rubric than the ones most participants obtained in this study. A test-taker with collective values would be more likely to take into account the opinion of a long-time family friend and not go to the chosen country anymore, or perhaps if the scenario had established that it was one's own parents that do not wish for the person to go to that particular country, more test-takers in this study would have decided not to research any more. Any of these cases would have been unfairly punished by the rubric. The score for Knowledge Discovery (the main subcompetence at play in this scenario) does not account for the involvement of close relationships or other emotional factors in the

intercultural search for knowledge of the individual, nor for the hierarchical sense of self in relation to others who may be involved in the scenario. The collective values of test-takers definitely play an important role in deciding what to do in this scenario, but when such conflict arises during assessment, the assessor's hands are tied, since the tool does not account for changes in collective vs individualistic societies, nor for high power distance vs low power distance collective values. If the test-taker comes from a highly individualistic background or culture, as was the case of the American students in this study, the opinions of other people will influence their decisions much less than if they come from a collective society and their decisions are more influenced by third parties and external factors, as it happens in Asian cultures, and in this case, individualistic, low-power distance attitudes were favored by the rubric. This is once more proof that the very concept of intercultural competence is a Western invention, and as such, it is imbued in Western values which reward independence, direct speech and action, and assertiveness.

8. Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

With this research, I wanted to explore aspects that, to my knowledge, have not been paid the attention they deserve within the field of intercultural competence and its assessment. The findings were many and highly interesting. Some of them were expected, while others hinted at new angles that I had not considered during the preparations and planning of this paper. In order to organize these findings and bring the paper to a cohesive conclusion, let us revisit the research questions and how the research results answered them.

1) What do labels like “effective” and “appropriate” imply when applied to intercultural exchanges and how do they impact our modern conception of intercultural competence?

As we could see throughout the course of this paper, many conceptual issues surrounding intercultural competence hinder its practical implementation and dilute its benefits, and this calls for new approaches to reshape its terminology in order to frame our understanding of what it actually embodies. Let us begin by reviewing the two popular definitions of intercultural competence mentioned at the beginning of this paper in this light:

- “The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2004: 194 in Deardorff, 2006: 247-248)
- “A complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Fantini, 2009: 458; Sinicrope et al., 2007: 1)

The underlined words represent the key action that interculturally competent individuals should exhibit, while “effectively and appropriately” indicate the quality or degree they should attain in such action. There are several issues these definitions pose in relation to practical reality. First of all, it should be noted that they are perfectly applicable to any type of human communication. In other words, if the intercultural wording is removed from them, they describe exactly how successful interaction looks like in *any* given situation, using *any* interpersonal skills, with *any* agents involved in the communication event. Therefore, intercultural communication is not being described or understood as any different from other types of communication. The fact that the exact “ability/abilities” are not specified does not help either, which is probably the reason why most tools define the composites of intercultural competence in their own way and there is no consensus. What, then, makes

intercultural interaction different from other intragroup interactions? After all, not all intragroup exchanges are “successful” (another vague and problematic term in any case), so why should it be expected that intercultural ones ought to be? To this may be added the fact that the existing literature and the different tools also fail to account for what “effective” and “appropriate” really mean. Does it mean that both interlocutors are happy with the exchange? Does this mean that one interlocutor submits to the other in order to keep the exchange flowing regardless of his/her true opinions or feelings? These gaps in the conception of intercultural competence need to be addressed before attempting to implement theories and frameworks. Most of all, the fact that human interaction is not neutral in any sense of the word should be acknowledged. Any insistence or efforts devoted towards developing the field in a “neutral” way will repeatedly bump into the same problems of vagueness and fail to fill the conceptual gaps that keep hindering its practical implementation. Many of the issues encountered during the data analysis of this paper could indeed be traced back to the notion that the tool and its supporting framework pretended to be “neutral,” a notion that could not be sustained or reflected accurately in the test results when it was checked against the reality of human nature in the form of the test-takers’ responses to the assessment. For this reason, openly recognizing that this neutrality cannot be achieved, and that, likewise, a neutral stance does not guarantee an equal starting point for all participants to share in intercultural exchanges and assessment, could be a good first step towards renewing the field at terminological and conceptual levels. Once this lack of neutrality is acknowledged, it must be decided which non-neutral stance would be best to adopt in order to contribute to fair, egalitarian and successful intercultural exchanges. Examples like the Campinha-Bacote intercultural competence model (2005), which employs its particular interpretation of the Bible to inform its theoretical background and practical implementation, can certainly not be accused of being neutral, but the way in which its authors have chosen to exercise their partiality perpetuates oppression by enshrining certain

dominant groups, practices and individuals. The researcher of this paper would never advocate for such a one-sided understanding of intercultural competence. Instead, this paper proposes the concept of interculturality to inform intercultural competence instruction and assessment (more details on this proposal are offered in the conclusion of research question #3).

2) Which philosophical currents and ideas inform the requirements for an individual to qualify as interculturally competent, and how do these ideas fit into the current globalized era we live in?

This paper aspired to frame and contextualize intercultural competence and its assessment within the modern world order, and what it represents for societies and individuals worldwide as it stands today. Philosophical concepts like the arbitrariness of culture (Wallerstein), symbolic violence (Bourdieu), and the role of globalization on our modern conception of intercultural competence all offered important insight into the macro-scale of its impact and how, perhaps unknowingly, an underdeveloped theory and premature implementation can indeed do more harm than previously thought. The most salient macro-scale issues I identified when contrasting the research results with philosophical stands (Bourdieu's and Wallerstein's most notably) were:

1) Cultural arbitrary is arbitrary: How to judge the appropriateness of an exchange? A point of reference is needed, and that point is always going to be culturally-determined and therefore, arbitrary. There is a key paradox in the analysis of any intercultural situation, and Kramsch explains it very accurately: "How can one mediate, that is, interpret one's own and the other's culture each in terms of the other, if at the same time one's interpretation is

culturally determined?” (Kramsch, 2011: 355). Indeed, it is a sociocultural paradox, and just like any paradox, there is no way of making it work in its current form.

2) Intercultural competence is a very convenient vehicle for the transmission, perpetuation or imposition of ideology: This does not mean that all implementations of intercultural competence will invariably act as such vehicle, but certainly that it could be used in such a way, even unknowingly, is worth considering. The variety of sub-categories contained within a framework and evaluated during assessment, or taught during training (indoctrination?), determine what “success” in intercultural competence looks like, and who is “apt” or “inept” at it: “All pedagogic action is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power.” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1998: 5). How to avoid symbolic violence during intercultural exchanges, then? Perhaps the coining of a new term like “Respectful Conflict” could work. Respectful conflict would focus on discussing and questioning any aspect of intercultural exchanges, including cultural practices and norms of the cultures involved, and respectfully listening to the other party’s analysis of the same situation. Conflict would thus not be avoided, but welcomed, and its resolution via acknowledgement and dialogue, encouraged. This notion, however, would need to be developed and analyzed critically before any attempts to spread or implement it are made.

3) “A universalist message of cultural multiplicity could serve as a justification of educating various groups in their separate ‘cultures’ and hence preparing them for different tasks in the single economy” (Wallerstein, 1990: 45): I could clearly see this message very well set in the minds of the participants of the study. The overwhelming majority of participants did not dare (or care) to criticize, question or even show minimal curiosity towards a cultural practice not pertaining to their culture (e.g. bullfighting scenario). At the same time, when a situation directly challenged their lifestyle or their conceptions of how things “should be,”

they promptly reacted when they considered a line had been crossed (e.g. going to church scenario). The truth is, these “lines” are just the invisible boundaries that the participants have learned to be the walls around their cultural identities and groups, and despite this particular conclusion of the thesis needing more development, I believe it is not unreasonable to question whether the single economy is indeed benefiting from this very limited and restrictive frame of mind that discourages exploring, discussing or even wondering about other practices and norms, since ultimately this prevents any questioning of the current order of things, while also nurturing herd mentality, fear of the Other, and conformism.

3) Is it possible to frame the contextualization of intercultural competence and its assessment by determining the gaps, flaws and limitations that its practical application possesses, and what does this mean for its future theoretical, conceptual and practical development?

The ultimate goal of the paper was to determine whether the presumption of trying to train and measure a construct such as intercultural competence is feasible, fair and sensible or if, on the contrary, this presumption is not only flawed at a practical level, but also founded on inequality, ideological oppression and global injustice. Grounded theory proved an excellent method to bring the reality of the current practice of intercultural competence and its assessment to theory, instead of the traditional way in reverse. In addition, employing an ethnographic component to supplement the assessment tool helped frame the bigger picture of the test-takers' life stories, upbringing, and previous experiences. The combination of both methods challenged the common criticism that qualitative research is disorganized and unmethodological by amalgamating the data collection and analysis processes into a comprehensive, holistic task, which encouraged theory development from the basis of

practical evidence (Charmaz 2008a, in Higginbottom & Lauridsen: 2014: 9). As for the results obtained, they are still inconclusive, but interesting notions that are worth researching further did arise from them.

First of all, there is the question of the practicality and feasibility of intercultural competence assessment. Can intercultural competence be measured? The results using the INCA tool suggest that it cannot. After comparing the tool's characteristics with the requirements for an assessment tool to be compliant with the six principles of test usefulness, it can definitely be asserted that, not only INCA, but most, if not all, intercultural competence tools do not comply with the six principles of test usefulness, most notably reliability, validity and impact, and, therefore, these tools cannot be considered trustworthy from an assessment quality point of view. In addition, introducing variables of individual characteristics when analyzing intercultural competence somewhat resembles the anthropic principle in physics. Basically, since any observed cultural behavior is always embedded in an individual, there is no way to separate the two (i.e. the individual's idiosyncrasies vs his/her culture-specific behaviors) – just as there is no way to separate our human observations of the Universe from the Universe itself. The problem of individual factors in intercultural competence appears because the tools and frameworks usually attempt to isolate the different components of intercultural behaviors and then test the individual's skills in these behaviors through a limited range of scenarios or situations. Understandably, it is impossible to address *every* possible cause or element that matters and applies to *each one* of the test-takers, and, therefore, there is just no way to know if a participant's score accurately reflects their overall ability or they were just "lucky" with the topics they were dealt in that particular testing event. When in conjunction with a certain degree of randomness (i.e. behaviors and personality traits that cannot be explained by any logical justification, and which do not have a clear origin in the life story, background, predisposition or experiences of the individual), the whole

thing appears less and less measurable by the minute, and this unpredictability does not seem to be the most solid foundation upon which to build a whole framework.

As for the future of the theoretical, conceptual and practical development of intercultural competence, there is still a lot of ground to cover to make the term fairer, more coherent and implementable. On the one hand, as it stands today, intercultural competence can certainly be used to nurture the aforementioned ill-ends of ideological oppression and global injustice, but on the other hand, it definitely shows great potential to become a key agent in the process towards achieving a more balanced and equal world for all by teaching individuals and groups how to talk to, understand, and respect each other. In order to make up for the flaws and gaps that abound in the implementation of intercultural competence and its assessment nowadays, as may be seen from the issues raised in section 7, some novel binding agent that brings the field together is necessary. In addition, it would of course be highly desirable that such a binding agent not perpetuate the inequalities and sociological issues that were discussed throughout the paper. For this reason, this study proposes interculturality as a potential binding agent that could achieve this difficult task.

Interculturality does not pretend to be neutral – what's more, it prides itself in its partiality, which is the core of its definition; but since an impartial standpoint is not really possible when it comes to the implementation of intercultural communication, interculturality certainly embodies a socially responsible option that fosters opportunities for intercultural activism, i.e. individual or group action taken in order to contribute towards social justice and power equality. Interculturality, often confused with intercultural competence itself, is an antihegemonic movement that promotes change and aspires to eliminate inequality by allowing for multiple perspectives and voices to be heard and actively participate in exchanges, including policy-making (Medina & Sinnigen, 2009). Intercultural competence,

for its part, is a set of communicative and pragmatic skills that is supposedly "contextless," and is not expected to take into account historical context, unequal power relationships or the life story and previous experiences of individuals. Instead, its focus rests on making communication and acceptance happen. It could be said that intercultural competence is just an instrument, but, when used properly, it has the potential to help make the world a better place. Therefore, this paper argues that intercultural competence should be the means through which to achieve interculturality; the means to an end. This combination would certainly eliminate any neutrality accusations and minimize many other issues that intercultural competence faces today. But how can interculturality achieve this exactly?

It should be noted that interculturality is not usually innate: it needs to be learnt. "Only a small proportion of culture is part of our consciousness" (Byram, 2008: 125), and, therefore, accessing the notions of culture hidden in one's subconscious (both related to one's own culture as well as others') requires "raising our awareness, increasing our critical analysis and developing our socially responsible action" (Sorrells, 2013: 16). Operating in intercultural spaces while employing these reflective and critical processes would ultimately allow individuals to engage in fair and successful dialogue and solve conflict with the ultimate purpose of "tak[ing] an insider's view as well as an outsider's view on both [one's] first and second cultures" (Kramsch, 2011: 355). Since a complete lack of context is not possible in the first place, the marriage between interculturality and intercultural competence would mean that the latter would act as a vehicle for interculturality to be implemented. During an interculturality-framed exchange, the interculturally competent individual should be able to see the world through the eyes of others, suspend judgment, relax his/her defensiveness, recognize and broaden the frames that limit his/her views and develop her/his flexibility and curiosity (Sorrells, 2013: 220-221), all while operating between multiple cultural frameworks and maintaining one's ethnic, cultural and personal values and practices. This is no simple

task, and some could even accuse this idea of having undertones of symbolic violence (after all, it is a call for pedagogic action), but the potential benefits that could derive from the union of interculturality and intercultural competence are well worth the effort and, perhaps, a pedagogic action that is aimed at restoring intercultural, economic, and social balance for all and that does not benefit certain groups over others is not undesirable considering the current state of affairs.

Interculturality has the potential of acting as the agglutinating agent that intercultural competence needs, and the first step towards intercultural awareness, critical thinking, conflict resolution and social action, at both personal and institutional levels. The author of this paper stands by the conviction that trying to implement intercultural competence without adopting an element like interculturality to inform its implementation and theoretical field is irresponsible, fosters injustice and perpetuates historical oppression. Only when historical and ideological intercultural barriers are overcome may true interaction, negotiation and egalitarian solutions emerge. Being aware that real and metaphorical frontiers are human-made can help us realize that they can therefore also be dismantled by humans, and this awakening will enable individuals to fight injustice and inequality and become successful citizens of the world. Any supposedly “effective and appropriate” interaction that does not attempt to redefine how individuals and groups conceive of each other *and* themselves in order to take joint action in the world is either empty of significance and impact for the interlocutors involved or, even worse, it means one interlocutor’s cultural and personal values have swallowed the other’s and given rise to an unequal and unfair exchange. We, as responsible interculturalists and humanists, must strive to create a conceptualization of intercultural competence that promotes equality, fairness, and justice for all, and that will help restore the balance of power between groups, races, genders, nationalities and societies at intra, inter, micro and macro scales.

9. Appendix

Appendix A. Scenarios

NOTE: The highlighted parts, as well as the text in red, are included here for reference purposes, but the version given to test-takers does not include these.

Name:	Date:
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Scenarios

Scenario 1 – TOLERANCE OF AMBIGUITY

Unexpected behavior (modified scenario from the INCA Assessor Manual, p.25)

One disadvantage of your work placement abroad is that the weekends are rather lonely. You normally spend your free time with friends and family and you miss this social side of your life. At work you become friends with a colleague who can speak your language. This colleague says that he/she will call you to do something together during the weekend. Your colleague does not contact you at all during the weekend and you feel a bit disappointed. There could be a number of explanations for this but you have received none from him/her so far.

1) *On Monday morning you decide to talk to another colleague about this in the office. How would you explain what had happened?*

2) *Later in the morning you meet the colleague who did not phone. He/she tells you that he/she could not call you because 'My mother asked me to go shopping for her'. Write a few lines as part of a letter/email to your family or friends in the US telling them about this incident and explaining what happened.*

Scenario 2 – RESPECT FOR OTHERNESS

An old tradition (original scenario devised by the researcher)

You have recently travelled to Spain to study a semester abroad there. You know enough Spanish culture to know that bullfighting is a very old tradition that many people feel proud of and consider it a national sport and a form of art, but that others regard it as cruel and barbaric. You recently made a new Spanish friend, but you do

not know his/her position on the topic. Your Spanish friend tells you one day "Did you hear? There was an anti-bullfighting demonstration yesterday."

1) *What would you reply to your friend?*

2) *If, after replying to your friend, he/she felt offended because they have a different opinion on the matter than yours, what would you tell them?*

3) *Would your relationship with your friend change in any way after this conversation? If so, why and in what ways would it change?*

Scenario 3 – KNOWLEDGE DISCOVERY

Going abroad (original scenario devised by the researcher)

You will soon be travelling to another country to study a semester abroad there. When you tell your best friend, he/she seems concerned about that particular country and tells you: "Are you sure you want to go there? I heard that people over there are usually not very welcoming of Americans, and a good friend of my family who lived there for three months told us their hygiene standards are not the best and it's not uncommon to get food poisoning." Your friend's new information leaves you a bit preoccupied about your choice of country.

1) *Would you still go to this country for a semester after hearing your friend's information? Why / Why not? (give details)*

CHOOSE ONLY ONE OF THE FOLLOWING AS APPLICABLE DEPENDING ON WHAT YOU ANSWERED IN THE PREVIOUS QUESTION:

1.a) *If you decide to still go, what would you do in order to feel comfortable again with your choice of country?*

1.b) *If you decide to go to a different country instead or to not go altogether anymore, explain what made you change your mind.*

Scenario 4 – EMPATHY

Sunday plans (original scenario devised by the researcher)

You have recently travelled to another country to study there a semester. Things are going very well and you are enjoying your stay there and your new friends. One day, one of your friends asks you to join him/her and three more of your friends for lunch in a new restaurant the following Sunday. You usually like to attend church on Sundays so you tell him/her that you'd be joining them afterwards but that it is important for you to attend Sunday mass. Your friend tells you: "Oh, come on, why do you prefer to go to church? It's boring! It's not even proven that there exists a God anyway. Join us for lunch instead, it's a much better plan!"

- 1) *Would you still attend church on Sunday or join them for lunch instead? Why? (give details)*
- 2) *What do you think of your friend's insistence and why do you think they insisted so much?*
- 3) *Would your relationship with your friend change in any way after this conversation? If so, why and in what ways would it change?*

Scenario 5 – BEHAVIORAL FLEXIBILITY

Greetings (original scenario devised by the researcher)

You have recently travelled to Spain to study there a semester. You know enough Spanish culture to know that, when greeting people, women kiss both other men and women in both cheeks and men kiss women on both cheeks but shake hands with other men. In your country, it is not usual to kiss people unless you know them very well and this reduced personal space situation is new to you, but you know that refusing to kiss when introduced would be regarded as rude.

- 1) *What do you think you would do when confronted with the situation of being introduced to new people (of both sexes) and why? (give details)*
- 2) *Imagine that you are writing or e-mailing a friend in your own country. Write down the thoughts you might have on this situation. Imagine what your reactions might be and how you would deal with the situation.*

Appendix B. Survey

Name:	Date:
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Survey

Background information

- Name:
- Email:
- Cell phone number:
- Skype:
- Spanish class level:
- Spanish class instructor:

(**REMEMBER**: Your real name and contact information will **not** be revealed at any point during the study and your anonymity is **guaranteed**):

- Age:
- Profession/Studies/Major:
- Country of birth:
- Citizenship:
- Country, state and city where you grew up:
- Religious affiliation and degree of religious involvement:
- Race(s) and ethnicity/ethnicities:
- Any cause that is important to you:
- How much exposure to/contact with other races and ethnicities did you have while growing up? If any, how was your relationship with them?
- How many people who come from backgrounds or ethnicities different from your own are you close with at present? (name their ethnicities and the type of relationship you have with them)

Foreign languages

- Which languages, if any, do you speak well? (i.e. you can have a full conversation in these languages)

- Have you studied other languages (even if you don't speak them fully) or taken culture courses? Which language(s)/ culture course(s)?

- Where, how and for how long did you learn these languages? (e.g. *Spanish – At UMBC, to fulfill language requirement, one semester / German – In Germany, while working abroad, one year / French – With a private tutor, for fun, six months etc.*)

- How often do you read books, watch movies or otherwise engage in free-time activities that involve foreign languages? If any, which activities are these?

- In what ways, if any, do you believe learning a foreign language affects how a person sees other cultures?

Intergroup experience

- How interested are you in other cultures? (**Highlight** as appropriate)

Not too interested – A little interested – Somewhat interested – Very interested – Extremely interested

- Can you give two examples of situations in the past in which you had to deal with people who came from backgrounds or ethnicities different from your own, even if only superficially or briefly?

- Have you ever worked or engaged in a joint enterprise or project with members from various cultures? Describe them briefly.

➤ Could you tell me about an intercultural experience in your past that you consider significant to you personally, if any?

➤ Could you tell me about a cultural or linguistic mishap that you have experienced in the past while talking a foreign language or while being involved in a situation with people from other cultures or ethnicities and how did you solve the situation?

➤ How do you think people could enhance their relationships with people who come from backgrounds or ethnicities different from their own in order to form deeper connections?

International experience

➤ Number of foreign countries visited (any purpose: study, work, vacation, etc.):

➤ Number of foreign countries visited for living, work or study purposes ONLY:

➤ Name which are those countries, what was the reason for travelling there and how long you stayed each time (e.g. *France – Studying abroad, one semester / Brazil – Tourism, one week / Caribbean area – Cruise vacation, five days / Chile – work, one year etc.*):

➤ If any, how many friends from abroad do you have and where are they from?

Any other comments/information

➤ Any other comments, additional intercultural experiences or personal statements that you feel are important to your identity or relationship with others:

Appendix C. INCA Rubrics

OPENNESS STRAND [Tolerance of ambiguity & Respect for otherness]

		1	2	3
COMPETENCES ↓		1 BASIC	2 INTERMEDIATE	3 FULL
i) Tolerance of ambiguity	1T Deals with ambiguity on a one-off basis, responding to items as they arise. May be overwhelmed by ambiguous situations which imply high involvement.	2T Has begun to acquire a repertoire of approaches to cope with ambiguities in low involvement situations. Begins to accept ambiguity as a challenge.	3T Is constantly aware of the possibility of ambiguity. When it occurs, he/she tolerates and manages it.	
v) Respect for otherness	1R Is not always aware of difference and, when it is recognized, may not be able to defer evaluative judgment as good or bad. Where it is fully appreciated, adopts a tolerant stance and tries to adapt to low-involving demands of the foreign culture.	2R Accepts the other's values, norms and behaviors in everyday situations as neither good nor bad, provided that basic assumptions of his own culture have not been violated. Is motivated to put others at ease and avoid giving offence.	3R Out of respect for diversity in value systems, applies critical knowledge of such systems to ensure equal treatment of people. Is able to cope tactfully with the ethical problems raised by personally unacceptable features of otherness.	

KNOWLEDGE STRAND [Knowledge Discovery & Empathy]

		1	2	3
COMPETENCES ↓	1 BASIC	2 INTERMEDIATE	3 FULL	
iv) Knowledge discovery	1K Draws on random general knowledge and minimal factual research about	2K Has recourse to some information sources in anticipation of everyday	3K Has a deep knowledge of other cultures. Develops his knowledge	

	other cultures. Learns by discovery and is willing to modify perceptions but not yet systematic.	encounters with the other cultures, and modifies and builds on information so acquired, in the light of actual experience. Is motivated by curiosity to develop his knowledge of his own culture as perceived by others.	through systematic research-like activities and direct questioning and can, where this is sought, offer advice and support to others in work situations.
vi) Empathy	1E Tends to see the cultural foreigner's differences as curious, and remains confused about the seemingly strange behaviors and their antecedents. Nonetheless tries to 'make allowances'.	2E Has the beginnings of a mental checklist of how others may perceive, feel and respond differently to, a range of routine circumstances. Tends increasingly to see things intuitively from the other's point of view.	3E Accepts the other as a coherent individual. Enlists role-taking and de-centering skills, and awareness of different perspectives, in optimizing job-related communication/interaction with the cultural foreigner.

ADAPTABILITY STRAND [Behavioral flexibility & Communicative Awareness]

NOTE: Communicative Awareness was not be tested in this study due to logistics and scope limitations.

vi) Behavioral flexibility	1B Adopts a reactive/defensive approach to situations. Learns from isolated experiences in a rather unsystematic way.	2B Previous experience of required behavior begins to influence behavior in everyday parallel situations. Sometimes takes the initiative in adopting/conforming to other cultures' behavior patterns.	3B Is ready and able to adopt appropriate behavior in job-specific situations from a broad and well-understood repertoire.
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