AN INTERCULTURAL MODEL FOR DIPLOMACY TRAINING IN NEW ZEALAND

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This study was initiated by my telephone communication[1] with New Zealand diplomats. Intercultural training has been a long-standing interest of mine, and recent contact with diplomats literally highlighted the issues that directed me to a novel but exciting area of study. Here are some of the questions I asked one diplomat during a telephone interview:

Me: Do you run intercultural training programmes such as using intercultural patterns?
Diplomat: Sometimes, in particular, with Maori culture.
Me: What other trainings do you have?
Diplomat: Language training, of course.

Of course, it is important to have language skills to make life easier. However, language training does not necessarily include any emphasis on intercultural training. This conversation reflects how little attention diplomats pay to intercultural training. Even when intercultural training is used, the focus is placed on using cultural patterns and categories. Generally speaking, little literature can be found on intercultural training within diplomatic training. The only related literature is in the teaching of intercultural communication, which focuses strongly on using cultural patterns. This is a Western approach and no local theories or insiders' perspectives have been stressed. It is therefore imperative to develop an appropriate approach for the training of diplomats. These research questions are posed for the exploration of the approach:

- Which programmes are employed for diplomacy and intercultural training?
- Are these training programmes feasible?
- Is it possible to develop an effective approach to intercultural training for diplomats?

This paper aims to explore issues in relation to these questions. Specifically, first, it will provide some background information about diplomacy training in New Zealand. Second, it will discuss advantages and disadvantages of using cultural patterns, as training programmes frequently involve the use of cultural patterns.[2] Third, it will review literature in relevant areas such as inter-

cultural communication, language pragmatics and classical rhetoric. Fourth, it will propose the need for incorporating a local or culture-specific perspective within diplomacy training. Finally, the paper will develop a model of diplomacy training based on intercultural competence and situated learning and apply the model to intercultural encounters. The research is based on a literature search and a critique of the use of cultural patterns. In addition, I conducted six interviews with New Zealand diplomats in Wellington. For the sake of confidentiality, their names and positions will remain anonymous and their views or comments will be incorporated where relevant, particularly in the area of background information for New Zealand diplomacy training.

Some Background Information about Diplomacy Training in New Zealand

As briefly mentioned, New Zealand does not utilise many programmes in diplomacy training. However, according to my interviews with diplomats, some programmes exist as part of current diplomacy training. These are in the areas of:

- language training;
- task- and policy-focussed training;
- using intercultural patterns.

Diplomats are required to undertake one year of language training before being posted overseas. The second and most common type of training is task specific. As New Zealand is a result-oriented culture, task-oriented training in education or development issues has become a major part of diplomacy training. The study of cultural patterns is used only in limited areas with a clear cultural issue. For example, New Zealand is a bicultural country composed of Maoris and European New Zealanders. The understanding of Maori cultures has been stressed in training and the study of cultural patterns is used to a certain extent in this particular area. In general, trainers tend to rely on the use of various models for diplomacy training such as cultural patterns.

Introducing Cultural Patterns

Frequently used cultural taxonomies include Hall's categories of high- and low-context cultures[3] and Hofstede's categories of individualism vs. collectiv-

ism, power distance, masculinity and femininity, and uncertainty avoidance.[4] Both researchers classify cultures according to their position along a continuum of certain dimensions such as high- and low-context, and individualism vs. collectivism. These dimensions describe universal features of cultures. For example, the concepts of high- and low-context can be used to explain all cultures, based on direct and indirect communication styles. Many Asian cultures are high-context, while the United States, Australia and New Zealand are low-context. In a similar way, Hofstede divides cultures into individualistic and collectivistic based on the concept of self or how self is related to various groups in society. Many of the high-context cultures also exhibit characteristics of collectivism and low-context cultures share similarities with individualism.

Related to generalisation is the cross-cultural approach that tends to provide trainees with specific skills, yet based on cultural patterns. For example, McCaffery proposes a how-to-learn orientation.[5] He criticises pattern-focussed training, which, he claims, relies on learning pieces of information about a particular culture. McCaffery stresses the importance of individual experience when learning about a different culture. Accordingly, he proposes skills based on everyday life experience including observation, self-reflection, transactions, saying no, and responding to ambiguity. With these ideas, McCaffery indicates that one has to observe intercultural encounters carefully, reflect on the encounters, adapt one's behaviour around daily transactions, learn how to say no or how to avoid saying no and work out strategies of responding to ambiguous situations in a new culture.

This kind of skill-focussed training programme is very popular because of its easy application and task focus.[6] For example, the programme can be easily assessed by looking at how many skills have been taught to trainees. However, McCaffery falls into another kind of generalisation in applying these skills based on predominant cultural patterns with little culture-specific consideration.

A combination of both categories and skills can also be employed. For example, Harris and Moran[7] include both in their training programmes for managers conducting business with other cultures. They name these two approaches "research" and "action learning" respectively. Similar skills have been stressed and utilised in other training programmes designed by Chaney and Martin[8], Lustig and Koester[9] as well as Simons and associates.[10]

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Cultural Patterns

There are both advantages and disadvantages to using cultural patterns. A discussion of them can highlight the necessity for developing a more holistic approach in diplomacy training. Advantages are discussed first.

The first advantage is the fact that dimensions or categories can help us understand cultures, and sometimes multiple dimensions can be applied to one particular case. Second, these categories can be used as references for identifying differences. As Tayeb[11] points out, intercultural patterns provide an analytical tool for comparisons across cultures. Third, the study of cultural patterns also clarifies our thinking. As part of our thinking process we need to put things into categories in order to simplify and systematise the information we receive. Otherwise, we would be overwhelmed by hundreds of thousands of stimuli everyday. The use of cultural patterns helps us to sort our information and make sense of the events around us. In particular, the categories are useful for understanding new cultures.

However, using cultural patterns also carries disadvantages. The first disadvantage is related to simplification and generalisation of information.

This kind of generalisation can also be related to the cognitive constraints deriving from certain cultures. Cognitive constraints are often discussed in relation to social and cultural conditions.[12] For example, Ting-Toomey describes the cognitive constraints in which culture interferes with effective intercultural understanding. According to her, the frames of reference within one particular culture provide a backdrop to which all new information is compared. Ting-Toomey's idea of cognitive constraints can also apply in explaining the approaches used for intercultural training. For example, both cultural patterns and cultural skills used in intercultural training are predominantly a Western approach and, therefore, tend to indicate certain sets of cognitive constraints in understanding other cultures. This phenomenon also poses a challenge for intercultural training in incorporating an insider's perspective.

The second disadvantage is that the use of cultural patterns focuses on obtaining results rather than on processes. For example, training programmes can be assessed based on the number of cultural patterns and skills learned or required of the trainees.

The third disadvantage is that the use of cultural patterns is based on an *etic* or culture-general rather than on an *emic* or culture-specific perspective. The terms *etic* and *emic* are used in social science as standard vocabulary although originally they derived from anthropological linguistics. The term *etic* is taken from phonetics and *emic* from phonemics. According to Pike[13],

phonetics refers to a universal system describing the sounds of various languages while phonemics refers to the study of the sound system of a particular language. Pike also extends this distinction to non-linguistic cultural phenomena. In contemporary research[14], *etic* study involves using cultural-general constructs for comparison across cultures while *emic* focuses on cultural-specific aspects from within a culture. There is a genuine lack of the *emic* perspective in cultural pattern-based training since these patterns are known to be universally applicable. We need to incorporate an *emic* perspective as well in order to ensure that all cultures' voices are heard in intercultural training and research.[15] Therefore, both dimensions are seen as essential for this study. With both of these dimensions, we will be able to overcome any cognitive constraints deriving from generalisations based on just one particular perspective such as the *etic*.

High-Level Intercultural Competence

If current intercultural training approaches are revisited in the light of intercultural competence theories, one can see that cultural-pattern based training may fail to target high-level competence. Collier and Thomas[16] have contributed a four-stage developmental model regarding intercultural competence:

- unconscious incompetence
- conscious incompetence
- conscious competence
- unconscious competence

These four stages clearly intend to point to levels of competence where the most advanced level is unconscious competence; they can, as well, be useful in discussing the types of competence in communication. However, Collier and Thomas give no further illustration as to how to achieve the highest level of competence. In spite of that, "conscious competence" and "unconscious competence" are relevant here as they represent high levels of competence.

Kim asserts that communication competence is composed of cognitive, affective and operational levels.[17] At the cognitive level, the individual needs to have competence in language and knowledge of the host culture. At the affective level, competence consists of the emotional capacity to deal with the challenges of a host culture and to understand the hosts' emotions and aesthetic values. Operational competence involves behavioural competence in which

an individual is able to select appropriate communication strategies to interact with the host country successfully. From this we can see that high-level competence involves an all-round knowledge that apparently goes beyond general cultural patterns and skills. In other words, cultural generalisations alone will be far from sufficient to offer us adequate skills for intercultural encounters.

A further reference can be made to Kim, who asserts that communication competence occurs in a relationship between an individual and a specific task. This also specifies the way in which high-level competence can be achieved. An individual may have the ability to communicate across cultures but only particular communication relationships will be competent. Kim's research found that situational factors were more important than an individual's disposition and competent communication will not occur unless there is a positive relationship.

Kim gives no specific details as to how to develop from one level of competence to another. However, one point may contribute to high-level competence: it is essential to develop a positive relationship through completing specific tasks in a given context. Here, Kim talks about higher levels of intercultural competence as he examines problem-solving in real-life situations. Kim's view echoes cognitive learning theory[18] and learning in situated contexts.[19] For example, Vygotski views situated contexts as essential to knowledge acquisition.

From this, we can see that situated learning or learning in specific contexts can help trainees achieve a high level of competence, and in particular an unconscious competence. However, current training programmes based on the study of cultural patterns are mainly based on an *etic* approach, either providing generalisations about cultures or giving recipe-like skills. They may help achieve a certain level of competence such as conscious competence, but they fail to target high-level competence. The major reason for this is that no clear stress has been placed on culture-specific and situated contexts. In order to provide an all-round view of the cultures for the trainees, it is important to incorporate the *emic* perspective. Specifically, the ethnography of communication is reviewed below.

The Ethnographical Dimension

The ethnography of communication provides an approach to studying culture from the "inside." It is also known as the interpretive approach, which gained prominence in the late 1980s among communication scholars. Researchers in

this area believe that humans construct reality and that an external view alone is not sufficient for understanding human behaviour. They also believe that human experience, including communication, is subjective. In order to reduce the subjectivity caused by one's perceptual biases, interpretive researchers propose a descriptive approach. Their major objective is to describe culture and observe how culture is created and maintained through communication. In this way, they can provide an insider's perspective or understanding of a cultural practice from within the culture itself. This perspective can help overcome the cognitive constraints identified earlier in this paper.

Ethnographers use methods derived from anthropology and linguistics and, in particular, from Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication.[20] Frequently used methods include field studies, observations and participant observations. Hymes particularly advocates the importance of participant observations in understanding the different components of speaking. An example of the ethnography of communication tradition can be found in Jarvis.[21] Jarvis and his research team observed the Euro Disney culture, primarily using interviews and participant observations. They discovered, for example, that management and workers operated with conflicting values, which was the key for further problem-solving within the organisation.

In this way, the interpretive approach provides an insider's perspective; it also provides the researcher with a possible tool for comparing any external views. In other words, both the insider's and outsider's views can be incorporated into the research. In order to achieve this dual perspective, the author proposes that the following areas can contribute to the *emic* approach: using local theories of target cultures, interviewing native speakers to verify research findings and participant observation. This paper will focus on the first two items in their relevance for diplomacy training.

Result-Oriented Learning vs. Process-Oriented Learning

Diplomacy training is characterised by its result orientation, one of the disadvantages discussed earlier. Various studies on process-oriented vs. result-oriented teaching in the teaching of ESL have been carried out and their findings can be applied here. For example, Leki explains that with a result-oriented approach, it is assumed that schemata can be taught directly.[22] Within a process-oriented approach, however, schemata are induced indirectly and gradually. A typical example of the result-oriented approach is often found in a classroom setting when readings are presented as models for successful com-

munication. With the process-oriented approach, readings taken from the target language are used to generate ideas. Students are often encouraged to reflect on the readings and report their impressions about the readings. The result-oriented classroom resembles the recipe approach in that both tend to focus on the prescribed rules of the sample texts. The process-oriented classroom, on the other hand, can be compared to a template metaphor since students are asked to learn guidelines and to reflect upon the sociocultural conventions underlying the structure of the text. These rules can also be applied to diplomacy training. It is imperative to promote process-oriented diplomacy training, utilising the template approach. In this way, trainees, instead of focusing on various patterns only, can learn more flexibly some guidelines for intercultural competence.

Process-oriented training is also related to the ethnographic approach. For example, trainees can be encouraged to participate in and observe a culture from the insider's perspective. They can thus enhance their competence through active participation in various activities relating to the knowledge of a specific context within a particular culture. In a similar thrust, Zhu[23] and Zhu and Rolland[24] found that business students could enhance their learning by merging themselves into a specific organisational context. The remainder of this paper will focus on developing a model that suggests ways to incorporate the process-oriented as well as the *emic* perspectives.

Developing a Triple-Level Training Model

Based on the theoretical dimensions discussed above, a training model aimed at both *etic* and *emic* perspectives is proposed here. This model targets high-level competence, taking into consideration all the theoretical perspectives discussed above. Specifically, this model involves three levels: the macro level, the meso level and the micro level, all of which are detailed below.

The Macro Level/Etic Perspective

Cultural patterns can be used as starting points for identifying cultural differences. Categories and generalisations can be made at this level based on the general preferences of national cultures. For example, high- and low-context cultures are useful and effective terms for identifying differences in the beginning. Trainees can also refer to their own experiences of communicating with individuals from both high- and low-context cultures.

Meso Level/Emic Perspective

The meso level refers to examining cultural differences from the perspective of the target culture, and thus it is also the *emic* perspective. This level is also related to a process-orientation as it involves various processes of exploration and research. Specifically, it involves the processes of studying sociocultural contexts, examining linguistic skills and cultural language and exploring pragmatics and persuasion. All these areas have a close link with high-level intercultural competence.

First, learning sociocultural contexts will provide situatedness and contextualised factors for learning cultural differences. In this way, learning these contexts will help trainees to aim at high-level competence.

Second, trainees should learn linguistic skills, pragmatics and cultural language. Learning language skills is important; however, learning these skills alone is not sufficient. Trainees should be exposed to learning cultural language as well. By cultural language, I mean the specific cultural conventions and practices underlying linguistics skills.

Finally, rhetoric and persuasion refer to the use of language in relation to effective communication. Different cultures may have different preferences for persuading people. For example, according to Aristotle, *logos* or the logical approach is seen as the essential element of persuasion in the west.[25] However, both *logos* and *pathos* or the emotional approach are important persuasive orientations in many Asian cultures. Zhu and Hildebrandt point out that persuasive orientations are the root of cultural differences.[26] Understanding the differences will help us to enhance trainees' intercultural competence. It is therefore necessary for trainees to have access to some of the local theories of persuasion.

Micro/Etic and Emic Perspectives

The micro level involves both the *etic* and *emic* perspectives:

- Interpersonal relations;
- Specific strategies;
- Individual sociopsychological profiles, personal traits and preferred communication styles.

Both cultural patterns and culture-specific elements can be used for exploration at this level. For example, interpersonal relations can give some clues to the perceptual context involving both parties, specific task information provides background knowledge about certain forms of communication involved

such as verbal and non-verbal, and individual profiles offer indications of individual preferences.

Illustrating the Model with an Authentic Case

Using dialogues is a prevalent method in intercultural training. Dialogues also reflect our rhetorical thinking and the way in which we organise information. The dialogue presented here illustrates a communication breakdown. The proposed model is used to analyse the intercultural encounter. This dialogue takes place between a European New Zealander and a Chinese girl from Hong Kong[27]:

Anna: Anna speaking.
Miss Ng: Hi Anna! Why didn't you ring me in the past few days?
Anna: Is that all you wanted to tell me?
Miss Ng: Yeah…?
Anna: Bye then.
Miss Ng: Bye, Anna, but…

This conversation can be analysed with the three-level model. At the macro level, Anna is from New Zealand, a low-context culture, and Miss Ng is from Hong Kong, a high-context culture. The dialogue clearly shows some differences in how to begin a telephone conversation: the two participants couldn't decode each other's messages and their conversation thus ended before they could reach any substantial point.

The meso level offers further explanation about what lead to the communication breakdown. In Hong Kong, "Why didn't you ring me in the past few days?" can be easily interpreted as a greeting to indicate that the addressor misses the addressee. In the New Zealand context, however, this sentence can be easily misinterpreted as a criticism blaming the addressee for being lazy. In addition, an emic explanation helps the analysis. For example, Chinese persuasion has a focus on emotions or the pathos and thus there is a need for Miss Ng to indicate her feelings in this context.

The micro level details the interpersonal relationship. The two girls of different cultures are good friends at high school and they ring each other very often. In Hong Kong this relationship would allow the use of "Why didn't you ring me?" as a greeting. Miss Ng thus prefers a direct communication style. Anna, however, found it hard to interpret this as a greeting in this encoun-

ter. She also uses a direct style by asking Miss Ng for further explanations and hangs up when she fails to receive any.

In summary, all these levels of analysis provide a sound interpretation for this intercultural encounter. The explanations offer more dimensions than an analysis of the cultural patterns alone. For example, this encounter does not really fit into established patterns as the person from the high-context culture appears to be very direct and begins the conversation with a "criticism."

Conclusion

This paper has evaluated diplomacy training programmes in New Zealand and developed a model involving a series of processes of learning. The model mainly focuses on the learning processes of macro, meso and micro levels as well as the *etic* and *emic* approaches. It has been found that successful training lies in incorporating both the *etic* and *emic* perspectives in diplomacy training. The *etic* perspective enables trainees to have a systematic understanding of cultural differences, while the *emic* perspective can help trainees reduce possible over-generalisation. In this way, this model goes beyond identifying cultural differences and targets enhancing high-level competence as the ultimate goal for diplomacy training. Further research, however, needs to be carried out to explore new paradigms for high-level competence training. Further study also needs to be conducted on how to incorporate authentic cases diplomats collect overseas into training programmes, as their first-hand experiences can play a convincing and significant part in successful diplomacy training.

Endnotes

1 I had six telephone interviews with New Zealand diplomats in Wellington regarding intercultural training as detailed below.
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27 This is an authentic telephone conversation collected by the author.