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Literature Review on Intercultural Sensitivity

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Abstract: This study is to make a literature review on the research of ICS from the following perspectives, including the definition of ICS, main tools of assessing ICS, and research of ICS home and abroad. By analyzing the related literature, the author reaches conclusions as follows: 1) ICS is the attitudinal and emotional aspect of ICC, which should be researched dynamically. 2) Chen and Starosta's ISS is the most frequently-used tool (IDI sometimes) while conducting the ICS research. 3) Most of the studies use quantitative method to analyze the data, and it is rare to combine quantitative and qualitative methods together. 4) Diverse types of subjects are researched in the studies.

Key words: literature review; ICS; tools.

I. Introduction:

Intercultural sensitivity (ICS) belongs to the emotional and attitudinal level of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), into which quite a few scholars home and abroad have made in-depth research. ICS has different definitions and is interpreted from different perspectives. In the last decade, different scholars and researchers have conducted research on this topic quantitatively and qualitatively, with different groups of people as their respondents or subjects on different occasions. This study is aimed to make a literature review on the research of ICS in the past decade from the following aspects, namely, the definition of ICS, main tools of assessing ICS, and research of ICS home and abroad.

II. Research on ICS: different perspectives

2.1 Definition of ICS

Bronfenbrenner, Harding, and Gallwey's study (1958) is one of the earliest dealing with the concept of sensitivity. They propose two kinds of sensitivity: sensitivity to the generalized other and sensitivity to individual differences (i.e. interpersonal sensitivity). McClelland (1958) considered sensitivity to the generalized other as the ability to be sensitive to the social norms of one's own group, while Bronfenbrenner et al. treated interpersonal sensitivity as the ability to distinguish how others differ in their behavior, perceptions, or feelings. Intercultural sensitivity is similar to Bronfenbrenner et al.'s notion of interpersonal sensitivity (quoted from Guo-Ming Chen & Starosta, 2007:230).

Hart and Burks (1972) and Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980) further treated sensitivity as a mind-set applied in one's everyday life whereby one accepts personal complexity, avoids communication inflexibility, interacts consciously, appreciates the ideas exchanged, and tolerates intentional searching. Based on Gudykunst and Hammer's (1983) three-stage intercultural training model and Hoopes's (1981) intercultural learning model, Bennett (1984) explained intercultural sensitivity as a developmental process in

which we transform ourselves effectively, cognitively, and behaviorally from an ethnocentric state to an ethnorelative state. This transformation process includes six stages, i.e. denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. This model of intercultural sensitivity views intercultural sensitivity not only as an affective and cognitive ability, but also as a precondition for being intercultural competent (adapted from Guo-Ming Chen & Starosta, 2007:230-231).

Intercultural sensitivity is viewed as an attitudinal forerunner to successful intercultural encounters and a predictor of cultural competence (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992). It is true that “being sensitive to your surroundings and to other people is one of the hallmarks of a competent intercultural communicator” (Samovar & Porter, 2000: 286).

From the above literature, it is clear ICS should be considered from an interactive and dynamic perspective. In other word, ICS means an individual should firstly be sensitive to his own culture and to others’ culture as well. One’s sensitivity level is a changing process; different levels of ICS also indicate different levels of ICC. According to Chen and Starosta (1996; 1997; 2000), intercultural sensitivity can be conceptualized as “an individual’s ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication.” Intercultural sensitivity is an independent concept which contains six factors, i.e. self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement, and non-judgment. In a word, ICS is the attitudinal and emotional aspect of ICC, which is also the important indicator of ICC. and the research of ICS should be conducted in a dynamic way.

2.2 Main tools of assessing ICS

In 1992, Bhawuk and Brislin attempted to develop an instrument for measuring ICS from the perspective of individualism and collectivism.(Chen & Starosta, 1997). The inventory they proposed is the Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ICSI), which has its own advantages. For example, among these three aspects measured, to assess an individual’s open-mindedness is to directly assess an individual’s ICS. However, Kapoor and Comadena (1996) found that Bhawuk and Brislin’s measure was relatively unreliable

due to the ambiguity of tone and directions of items used in the scales (quoted in Chen & Starosta, 2000).

According to Bennett (1986; 1993), ICS can be expressed as a continuum consisting of three Ethnocentric stages (denial, defense, and minimization), and three Ethnorelative stages (acceptance, adaptation, and integration). This is Bennett's DMIS (referring to Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity), which consists of six stages ranging from Denial of difference to Integration of difference. Then in 1998, based on the theoretical base of DMIS, Bennett and Hammer developed IDI (referring to Intercultural Development Inventory), which proves to be a valid assessing instrument. In the opinion of Chen and other scholars, Bennett has confused the concept of ICS with ICC. Bhawuk and Brislin also confuse the three aspects of ICC. Chen and Starosta (1996, 1997) put forward their understanding of ICS, which clarified the confusion of the concept of ICS with that of ICC and intercultural awareness.

Chen and Starosta develop the intercultural sensitivity scales (ISS) based on the theories on intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity of other scholars. The ISS has demonstrated strong reliability and appropriate concurrent and predictive validity (Chen & Starosta, 2000), and the scale is proved to be reliable and valid by other scholars. It is suitable to assess participants' ICS than IDI and other scales because it distinguishes ICS from other components of ICC and ICC itself. This scale is developed mainly to assess participants' ICS, the affective or emotional dimension of ICC, while IDI and other scales are mostly to assess participants' levels of ICC. Therefore, Chen and Starosta's ISS is given a preference to be adopted as the main tool of assessing the subjects' ICS.

2.3 Research of ICS home and abroad

By surfing literature, in China, during the past ten years, many scholars have used Chen and Starosta's ISS to conduct research on the ICS of different groups of subjects. They are mainly English or non-English majors (Wu Y., 2006; Zhou X.Y., 2007; Peng S.Y., 2006, 2007; Hu W. 2008; Zhao X., 2012; Zhou X.Y., 2015); English and non-English postgraduates (Li X., 2012; Liu Q., 2013; Huang Y.Y.. 2016); college English teachers (Jiang H.X., 2008; Zhang Y., 2017); teachers in general (Wang F., 2013); students majoring on

Teaching Chinese as a Second Language (Xia N. & Xia B.C., 2013) ; senior and junior high school students (Xia N., 2013; Wang Y.H., 2014; Zhou X.Y., 2014; Zou M., 2015) and people working in foreign trading companies (Yun F., 2008; Zhou X.Y., 2011).

From the above long list of papers, it is very clear that most of the studies are conducted empirically and quantitatively using Chen and Starosta's ISS. In China, ISS is easily attained while IDI is hard to get access to. Their difference mainly lies in the different subjects of the research, i.e to test the ICS level of different groups of subjects or to explore the relationship between ICS and other factors, among which the ISS is used four times by Zhou X.Y. alone (2007; 2011; 2014; 2015) to test different participants' ICS. The tool is mainly used to assess or test the participants' ICS levels, the correlation between five factors and ICS, or ICS with other variables. This result is testified by Xia L.P. and Han Z.J.'s study (2016) that the studies on ICS in China (from 2003-2013) are mainly empirical, and the research subjects are the survey of the status quo of ICS (53.2%), the cultivation of ICS (22.6%), the comparison analysis (16.1%), the connotation and literature review of ICS (4.8% and 3.3% respectively).

In foreign studies, the number of essays is much fewer than that of China. D. A. Straffon (2003) uses the IDI (Hammer & Bennett, 1998), a 60-item inventory, to measure the level of intercultural sensitivity (ICS) of high school students attending an international school. The results show that 97% of the students were operating in Bennett's Acceptance or Cognitive Adaptation stages from the DMIS. Levels of ICS were positively correlated with the length of time that the student had attended international schools.

Inkeri Ruokonena and Seija Kairavuoria (2012) uses IDI to determine the developmental level of intercultural sensitivity of the 9th graders and find it was mainly (39.5%) at the ethnorelativistic level. There were no significant differences between girls and boys. Saied Reza Ameli and Hamideh Molaei's (2012) study aims to investigate intercultural sensitivity among the followers of two Muslim sects, the Shia and Sunni in

Iran. To this end, we have applied Bennett's Intercultural Sensitivity theory as a conceptual framework. This theory states that the development of communication among people decreases their intercultural sensitivity levels.

Amy Jo Coffey et al. (2013) uses a modified version of Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), the study sought to identify which of the five ISS dimensions played the most influential role in intercultural sensitivity outcomes.

Ali Soltani ((2014) uses Chen and Starosta's (2000) Intercultural Sensitivity Scale for data collection. The results of the Chi-square indicated a strong relationship between intercultural sensitivity and ethnic background. In Paola Ruiz-Bernardo et al.'s (2014) paper, the data was gathered using a scale adapted from Chen and Starosta's (2000) IS scale.

Yaser Arslan et al. (2015) uses pre-experimental. Intercultural Sensitivity Scale developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) as data collection tool to determine the impact of Peace Education Programme (PEP) that is applied to university students on their intercultural sensitivity. Wenting Wang and Mingming Zhou (2016) abbreviated the 24-item Intercultural Sensitivity Scale to create a 15-item version (ISS-15) to find that the Chinese version of the ISS-15 was found to be valid and reliable for use in cross-cultural research settings with limited time constraints.

The above foreign studies indicate that most of them prefer to use Chen and Starosta's ISS (2000) or IDI developed by Bennett and Hammer (1993). Most of the studies are still empirical and quantitative research. W.T. Wang and M.M. Zhou's research (2016) is a great move forward to adapt ISS so that it can be used in cross-cultural research settings with limited time constraints.

III. Conclusion

To sum up, all the mentioned researches home or abroad have the following features in common. 1) ICS is the attitudinal and emotional aspect of ICC, which is also the

important indicator of ICC. and the research of ICS should be conducted in a dynamic way. 2) They all prefer to choose Chen and Starosta's ISS (sometimes IDI) to assess the ICS level of the subjects or explore the correlation between the five internal dimensions of ICS, or between other factors and ICS; 3) Most of the studies adopt a strategy of quantitative data collection and use statistical method to analyze the data; 4) Besides college students, English teachers or foreign trade workers, there are a diverse types of subjects in the studies. 5) The studies rarely integrate quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods together. In other words, the studies should use a multiple method to make the research more objective and comprehensive.

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