

## **Design and Development of Items for Assessing Intercultural Competence in East Asian Contexts**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This ongoing pilot study aims to establish and verify cultural conventional expressions as well as cultural attitudes and behaviours survey items in the East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) context. The participants in this study are 91 Chinese, 70 Japanese, and 70 Korean native speakers attending a college in each country. Survey questionnaire of intercultural development was developed based on the intercultural competence (IC) model. It included a 33-item self-assessment instrument with a five-point Likert scale for the cultural attitude and behaviour, as well as a 38-item aural-oral discourse completion task (DCT) on conventional expressions for the linguistic attributes section. The 71 items have been validated by Chinese native speakers through descriptive statistics and the thematic analysis of responses. The preliminary results from the data provide promising prospects that imply the verification of the 71 items in the Japanese and Korean contexts. This study contributes to the field of IC in foreign language classrooms, informing both future studies and instructional practices.

*Keywords:* Culture, conventional expressions, East Asian languages, intercultural competence, test development

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The importance of intercultural competence (IC) in foreign language classrooms (Chapelle, 2016) has increased aligning with the fast-paced transforming society due to the development of science, technology, and globalisation (Stewart, 2007). Thus, the 21<sup>st</sup> century language instructors are expected to play a role as a facilitator by creating an open atmosphere for language

learners to explore and compare between the native culture and the target language culture. The positive relationship between English language proficiency and IC focusing on communication were found among Chinese people (Feng, et al., 2024; Wang, et al., 2025). Lee and Song (2019) explored that American students learning East Asian languages significantly improved their IC through study abroad and telecollaboration. However, little research has investigated the effects of East Asian language learners' proficiency on IC for linguistic attributes and cultural attitudes and behaviours. Given that, the purpose of this study is to develop valid survey items for conventional expressions and cultural attitudes and behaviours in the East Asian (China, Japan, and Korea) context, to assess L2 East Asian language learners' IC. This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How can conventional expressions and cultural attitude and behaviour items be constructed in the East Asian context?
2. How can the validity of these items be verified?

## **RELATED LITERATURE**

Intercultural competence (IC) can be defined as the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with people in cultural situations (Deardorff, 2009; Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2009). Deardorff (2009) proposed the process model of IC, which demonstrates continual process of IC development from personal level to interpersonal level through intercultural interaction.

Successful intercultural interaction entails the acquisition of conventional expressions used in a target country. Conventional expressions are a type of formulaic sequences used as pragmalinguistic resources to convey illocutionary force (Bardovi-Harlig, 2009). Additionally, cultural attitudes and behaviours should not be overlooked to view learners' knowledge and comprehension (Hammer et al., 2003).

## **METHODS**

For the section of cultural attitude and behaviour, ten native Chinese college students in China, aged 19 to 23, have participated in the study and 81 students participated for the section of linguistic attributes so far.

Items for the cultural attitudes and behaviours on sociocultural norms shared by China, Japan, and Korea were developed using a format of the Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer et al., 2003). The questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) consists of 33 items, with 11 items dedicated to each of three categories: daily life, academic life, and the work environment.

For the section of linguistic attributes, a timed aural-oral Discourse Completion Task (DCT) that includes 38 real-life scenarios drawn from daily life, academic settings, and

professional environments was developed to elicit conventional expressions commonly used by Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans in the initiating and responding scenario format.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The preliminary results of the section of cultural attitude and behaviour indicate that the items functioned well for the Chinese section. For the 21 agreement items, the average score was 3.99 out of 5 ( $SD = 0.84$ ), while the average score for the 12 disagreement items was 2.07 out of 5 ( $SD = 0.83$ ). Specifically, items of daily life exhibit a high degree of uniformity, indicating that daily life is more universally shared due to common societal norms, followed by items of academic life. Items of work environment show lowest homogeneity, implying that there is more variation in how people experience at work. Preliminary data results suggest that the items effectively elicited consensus responses from L1 Chinese speakers. This is evidenced by the marked differences in ratings between agreement and disagreement items across all three categories.

Preliminary results of the section of linguistic attributes have shown that 33 conventional expressions were identified from 32 scenarios, with one scenario eliciting two distinct expressions. The production rates of these expressions ranged from 50.63% to 92.41%, with an average of 62.83%. Among these, three expressions achieved production rates of 80% or higher, while four expressions fell within the 70% to 80% range. 13 expressions were observed to occur between 60% and 70%, and another 13 were identified between 50% and 60% of the time. This variation indicates that some expressions are more commonly used in specific scenarios while others may be less frequent. Two examples serve to illustrate the types of scenarios and the conventional expressions elicited. In one initiating scenario, participants were asked to propose a toast at a colleague's wedding banquet. In this scenario, over 90% of Chinese speakers used the conventional expression (祝)(你们){百年好合/新婚快乐} (Wishing you a hundred years of happiness together or Happy marriage). In a responding scenario, participants were asked to clarify the meaning of the term 目标语 (target language) in a conversation with a classmate. Over 60% of participants responded with the conventional expression 目标语是{什么/啥}意思?(What does "target language" mean?).

According to the preliminary results, the items measuring cultural attitudes and behaviours demonstrated reliably in the Chinese section. Additionally, the items developed based on typical conventional expressions used by Chinese, Japanese, and Korean speakers showed cultural relevance and functional clarity in the Chinese section, suggesting that promising potential for similar effectiveness in the Japanese and Korean sections.

## CONCLUSION

This study is to verify cultural attitudes and behaviours survey items and conventional expressions in the East Asian context to assess L2 learners' IC. The pilot scores of cultural attitudes and behaviours survey demonstrate that these items are effective in capturing L1 Chinese speakers' sociocultural norms. The timed aural-oral DCT also proves to effectively elicit conventional expressions from L1 Chinese speakers. The preliminary results suggest that assessing similar skills in L1 Japanese and Korean speakers can be extended to evaluate IC in L2 learners of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean as three countries share many cultural aspects. The results also indicate that L1 speakers' responses can serve as a baseline data for examining L2 learners' perception of the norms of IC.

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