Developing Competence in Intercultural Interaction:
What are we aiming at?

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Overview

- Pragmatics research and ICC
- eChina-UK Programme & Global People (GP)
- Global People: Communication Issues
- Sample data
- GP Intercultural Competency Framework
- Implications for Pragmatics Research into ICC

Pragmatic Research & Intercultural Communication

Pragmatics Research & ICC

Common Topic Areas of Research:

- (Mis)Understanding in IC interaction

- Rapport in IC interaction

- (Comparative) study of specific features of language use (e.g. refusals, requests)

- Study of communication styles and preferences

Pragmatics Research & ICC

> ➤ *How important are these issues in authentic IC interaction?*

Global People

The eChina-UK Programme and the Global People Project

eChina-UK Programme

- Set of Sino-British collaborative projects on eLearning in education

- Funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (£4 million) & supported by Chinese Ministry of Education

- Involved British and Chinese universities working in partnership

- The Programme has had 3 phases

Global People

Global People: Background

Phases 1 & 2: British & Chinese universities worked collaboratively on range of eLearning in education projects

- Phase 1: 2003-2005.

- Phase 2: 2005-2007.

Global People Project forms Phase 3 of the eChina-UK Programme

- Phase 3: 2007-2009.

Global People

Global People: Background

Two of HEFCE's Key Goals for the eChina-UK Programme:

- Strengthen collaboration between China and the UK

- Disseminate generic insights on a range of issues, including the benefits & challenges of working interculturally

Global People

Global People: Background

Phase 3 (Global People): 2008–2009

Key Aims:

- Draw out learning from the eChina-UK Programme on working interculturally

- Identify generic frameworks and models (i.e. not country specific)

- Develop resources that are of practical value to those working in international projects (especially in HE)

Global People: Background

Phase 3 (Global People): 2008–2009

Procedure:

- Review the literature on intercultural competence and on working across cultures

- Analyse data from the eChina-UK Programme & Projects from an intercultural perspective

- Collect new interview data from eChina-UK project members

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Global People: Communication Issues

Key Parties in the Programme

Stakeholder/
Management

HEFCE

MoE

Lead
Universities

U of
Nottingham

BNU

BFSU

WUN

Open/
Cambridge

Tsinghua U

Team
Members

Senior
Management

Academics

Technical
Staff

Trainees

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Communication: Language

English or Chinese?

Chinese 16: *"I think we should show consideration for each other in terms of language. China is now developing very fast; they should know some Chinese to communicate with us. … We have learned a lot of English; it's their turn to learn some basic Chinese, as it's two-way communication. I find it weird that they don't know even a word of Chinese."*

他们应该懂中文

Communication: Language

Chinese or English?

Chinese 21: *The working language was English. Due to the language problems, when we couldn't express ourselves clearly, it seemed that we were disadvantaged.*

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Communication: Language Use

Meaning needs to be negotiated

British 09: *When I first joined, I spent weeks if not months on a simply practical confusion as to what is a unit, a module, what was the other one?*

British 06: *Activity*

British 09: *There was no standard definition, so I was like blocked at the first hurdle, and so I wasn't quite sure how much material I'd got to write … I thought I don't understand this, I can't do this.*

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Competencies for Language Use

- ❖ Language learning
- ❖ Language adjustment
- ❖ Active listening
- ❖ Attuning
- ❖ Stylistic flexibility
- ❖ Communication management
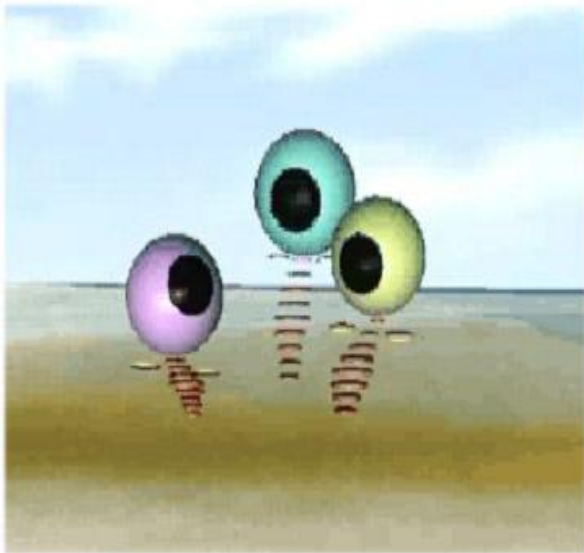- ❖ Building of shared knowledge (helps develop mutual trust)

Communication: Management

Management of Channels of Communication

Chinese Researcher: *In your opinion, was the communication effective?*

Chinese 20: *No, it wasn't. Though both Chinese and British sides had their own project managers, they couldn't do all the communications on their own. We should have embedded different communication mechanisms in the project at different levels.*

Communication: Management

Attention to Communication Protocols

Chinese 06: *The UK colleagues are more likely to raise issues directly. Their logic is that issues should be raised first, then they'll try their best to find solutions. … Sometimes the UK project manager sent some suggestions to us. When we got the suggestion, we usually got nervous and wondered 'must we do it immediately?' or 'are they commanding us to do this?' But working together with them for a while I gradually realised that I could voice my opinions too and take time to think. It wasn't a problem.*

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Communication: Management

Attention to Communication Networks

Chinese 02: *Sending mass emails is a good way. But when we send such emails, it will infringe Chinese principles. If I send such an email to a person in a higher position, s/he will feel offended. Nowadays we send various materials by email, but Chinese are special, superiors will feel particularly insulted. … Sending emails to superiors is not a good way, because it shows no regard for status differences between people. Some superiors dislike equality, so the best way to communicate with them is to submit a report, either in written or oral form.*

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Communication: Management

1. Finding the right person to talk to
2. Establishing the most effective modes of communication
3. Establishing suitable networks for communication distribution
4. Agreeing on choice of language
5. Establishing communication protocols

Communication: Establishing Shared Knowledge

- Not all information can be encoded in language;
- In IC interaction, people typically have less background knowledge in common;
- Deliberately planning for the establishment of shared knowledge is vital.

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Sample data

➢ Introductory meeting during an exchange visit

➢ Purpose: to discuss research interests and potential for collaboration.

Global People Intercultural Competency Framework

Global People

The Competency Framework

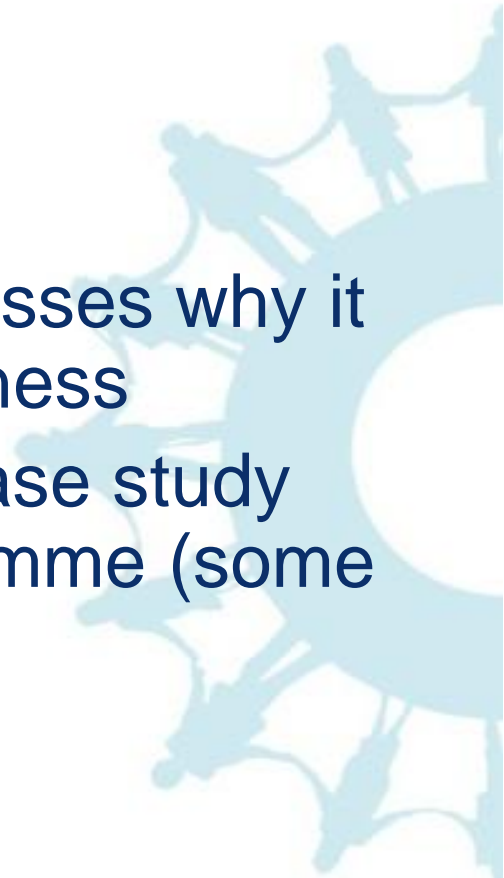- Intercultural collaborations are a delicate balancing acts

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- Our Competency Framework (which was grounded in the experiences of members of the eChina-UK Programme) was developed to help raise awareness of competencies that facilitate intercultural work

- It is relevant to pragmatics research into ICC

The Competency Framework

- Identifies four competency clusters
  - Knowledge and Ideas
  - Communication
  - Relationships
  - Personal Qualities and Dispositions
- Explains each competency and discusses why it is important for intercultural effectiveness
- Illustrates each competency with a case study example from the eChina-UK Programme (some of them supported by audio clips)

Case Study Example: Language Adjustment at the start of a meeting
Adjusting one's use of language to the proficiency level of the recipient(s) is vital for effective communication; however, it is sometimes easier said than done. Consider the following interaction that took place at one of our meetings:

◀ ❯ ▶

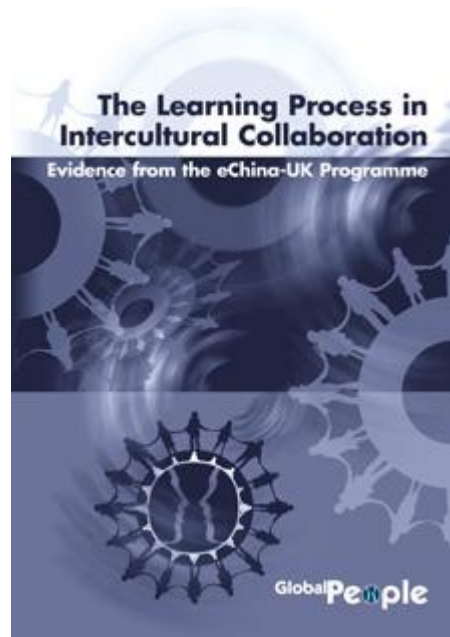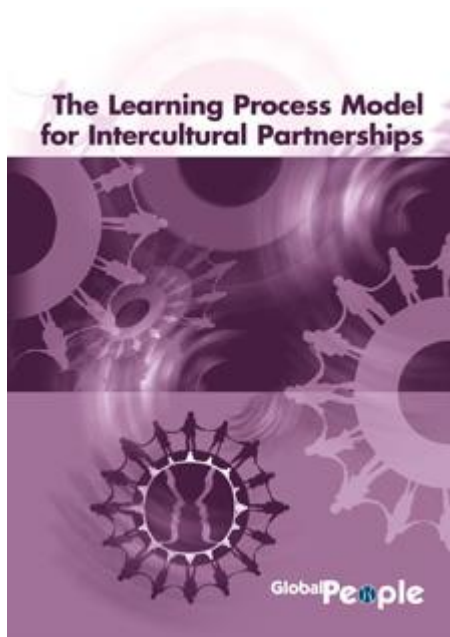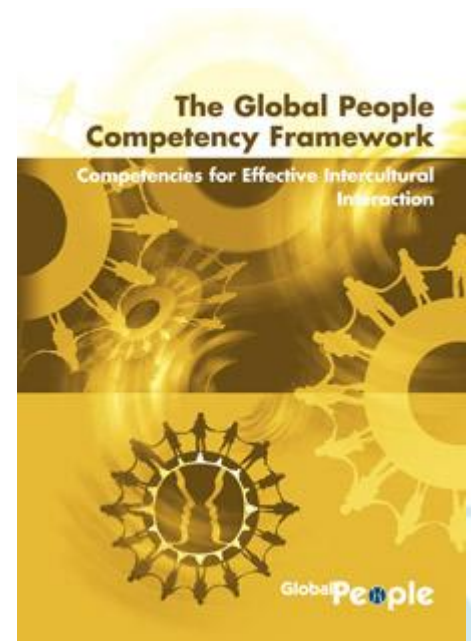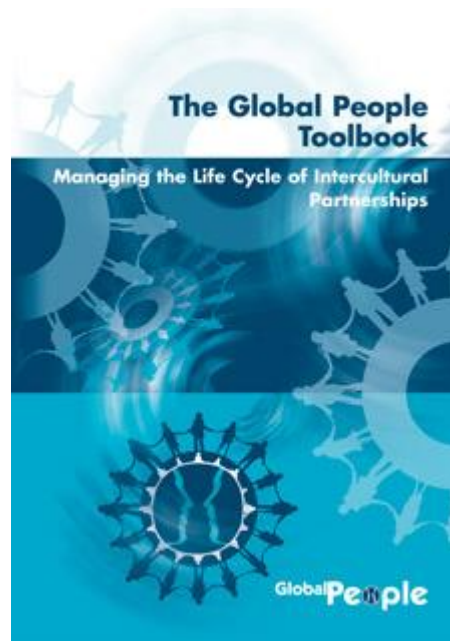| Chair:	*[...] I'm going to ask everybody to speak very clearly and uh without heavy accents if possible*
Everyone:	*Laughter [as the Chair speaks with a Scottish accent]*
Chair:	*and we may take some pauses just to make sure everybody uhm uh is keeping up with the conversation cause we can sometimes each of us speak very quickly when we get excited. Uh this afternoon is a chance for us really to explore the research issues ## tell each other what we're doing ## tell each other what we hope to achieve what we're aspiring to ### and it would be wonderful if we could perhaps focus on the use of technology in learning ## if that was of interest to you ##### so what I I'd like to do is I think it would be very helpful for one of our colleagues to volunteer to <as we say in Scotland: start the ball rolling cause we really love football>. Uh I think I think it would be fair to ask one of our colleagues to start the ball rolling and (name of British colleague) if you would like to kick off for us.*

This excerpt demonstrates a number of adjustment practices. The Chair clearly shows a high level of awareness of this competency, by asking participants to speak clearly, to avoid accents, to avoid fast speech and to pause regularly in order to ensure that all participants have the chance to follow the conversation. The Chair then goes on to put her insights into practice, speaking slowly and clearly, by pausing regularly (signalled by #) and trying to avoid the use of a heavy Scottish accent. However, only seconds later she speeds up (signalled by < >), falls into a heavy Scottish accent, uses an idiomatic expression ('to start the ball rolling') which leaves all but one of the Chinese participants with blank faces, and then goes on to repeat the idiom and to use complex vocabulary ('kick off'), which is unlikely to be understood and could easily have been replaced by a more simple word, such as 'start' or 'begin'.

Global People Resources

http://www.globalpeople.org.uk/

- Life cycle model of intercultural partnerships: *Global People Toolbook*

- Learning process model

- Competency framework

- Range of publications (downloadable, free of charge)

The Global People Landscaping Study
Intercultural Effectiveness in Global Education Partnerships
Global People

The Global People Toolbook
Managing the Life Cycle of Intercultural Partnerships
Global People

The Global People Competency Framework
Competencies for Effective Intercultural Interaction
Global People

The Learning Process Model for Intercultural Partnerships
Global People

The Learning Process in Intercultural Collaboration
Evidence from the eChina-UK Programme
Global People

Sino-British Interaction in Professional Contexts
Global People

Implications for Pragmatics Research into ICC

Questions for Pragmatics

1. **Are we researching key communication issues to those involved in the interaction? E.g.**

- Communication management
- How shared knowledge is built

Questions for Pragmatics

2. How do we handle inter-textuality?

    What unit of analysis can we use for handling ongoing communication over multiple communicative events?

Questions for Pragmatics

2. Inter-textuality

e.g. In eChina-UK Programme, this included:

- Current communicative event
- Team exchange visit
- Previous meetings/team exchange visits
- Other related communicative events
- Other forms of communication (email, video conference etc.)

Questions for Pragmatics

3. Analytic Frameworks

- What analytic framework can give sufficient attention to the "whether" of communication (i.e. Whether it takes place or not)?

- What analytic framework can give sufficient attention to the multiple participants of a project (e.g. how communication networks can be optimised; understanding the impact of stakeholders)?

Thank you

The Global People Team
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