

Measuring a sense of enduring Intercultural Sensitivity  
by way of childhood foreign language development  
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**Research Problem:**

There is not enough literature on the relationship between youth language development programming and lasting positive effects for adults. This specific literature gap is glaring because of the emphasis on globalization and language communication competencies in the workplace and in academia.

**Research Question:**

This research study is designed to highlight the correlation, if any, between participants with formal academic foreign language exposure in their childhood (0-18 years old) and any sense of enduring intercultural sensitivity<sup>1</sup> in the adult participant (19 and up).

**Purpose of Study:**

This test is aimed at determining if youth foreign language development is a key factor in fostering intercultural sensitivity, a veritable social asset for the globalized world and workplace. The specific purpose of the study is to provide credible quantitative evidence in support of youth language development programming if it is found that it supports a sense of enduring intercultural sensitivity.

**Value of Research:**

The value of the research varies among three main target groups.

**1. Educators**

- Aims to supply comprehensive, contextual data for educators
- Studies the correlation between foreign language development and intercultural sensitivity
- Highlights strengths and weaknesses in youth language development by assessing the target group's responses

**2. Policy Makers and Investors**

- Aims to supply credible evidence in support of the development of foreign language programs for youth
- Provides a framework for the suggested rigor of a foreign language development program in order to note chances in the subject
- Highlights an educational policy/marketing opportunity

**3. Youth**

- Aims to foster intercultural appreciation in youth
- Provides foundational language skills for the youth to build upon
- Changes the contexts of globalization by advocating for language competency

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<sup>1</sup> Chen and Starosta, 362

**Approach:**

By designing a complementary survey to the existing Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, provided by respected colleagues in the field of intercultural communication, the survey aims to explore participants' intercultural self-awareness. The survey may fail to determine any substantial link between youth language development and any consistent sense of enduring intercultural sensitivity in participants, but it will remain true to investigating participants' understanding of their language development and their own perceived, intercultural communication competency.

**Literature Review:**

First and foremost, according to the literature provided by Chen and Starosta, intercultural sensitivity is part of the larger umbrella term "intercultural communication competency," which regards *sensitivity* as the affective process by which people, "acknowledge, respect, tolerate, and integrate cultural differences, so that they can qualify for enlightened global citizenship."<sup>2</sup> The affective process runs simultaneous to the other primary processes: the cognitive process, and the behavioral process. Together they determine how the participant feels and acts in intercultural interactions.

Although intercultural communication competency, as a term, surfaces in a myriad of the literature, it is usually in reference to the skills employed by the interculturally sensitive when interacting in intercultural situations. This term provides use value to "a sense of enduring intercultural sensitivity" by determining what it is used for.

**Literature Survey:**

The literature review consists of two main series of research studies, which were conducted in the two associated fields; the state of youth language development programs, and separately, the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale research tool.

Chen and Starosta built their scale off of a series of models dating back to 1958, when Bronfenbrenner et al. introduced the concept of measuring interpersonal sensitivity based on the concept of understanding how someone differs in their behavior, perceptions or feelings.<sup>3</sup> Hart and Burks (1972) and Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980) used sensitivity as a mind-set; described as an employable ability in intercultural interactions. Subsequently, a series of studies conducted in the 1980's helped to further the assessment of intercultural competence by considering it a process by which one is able to transform himself or herself into a more effective communicator. This transformative stage for the assessment itself was furthered by Hoopes (1981), Gudykunst and Hammer (1983), and Bennett (1984), but it was Bennett who suggested intercultural sensitivity be

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<sup>2</sup> Chen and Starosta, 362

<sup>3</sup> Chen and Starosta, 3

measured by more than a just gradual change of interpersonal communication skills. He suggested instead that it be considered more so a stepping-stone on the way to becoming more competent in intercultural communication. In the stages just prior to Chen and Starosta's study, Bhawuk and Brislin finalized an instrument for measuring intercultural sensitivity in the individual, as opposed to one that aided in making broad sweeping conclusions about the given collective.<sup>4</sup> All of the aforementioned stages were vital to the creation of Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Communication Competency Model,<sup>5</sup> first developed in 1996 for the purpose of measuring the extent to which the sample populations were able to bridge gaps in cultural understanding and work together.

Separately, literature concerning youth foreign language development programs is dire, and the issue shifts from intercultural communication competency concerning foreign language-learners to the sheer lack of programming. According to one particularly well-cited article by Pufahl and Rhodes, published in 2008, K-12 language programs are experiencing ongoing shifts in prioritization for elementary and secondary school students across the country. The survey-based study pooled information from over 2,600 primary and secondary schools and gathered thorough results from all types of institutions, employing such varying criteria as: metro status, school size, geographic region, socio-economic status, and minority enrollment. Information was gathered from a solid sampling of schools and the results paint an unfulfilling portrait of youth language development programs across the country. From 1997 to 2008, both elementary and secondary schools saw significant decreases in formal language instruction, mostly in *public school* curricula.<sup>6</sup>

### **Literature Gap Assessment:**

Schools that do not maintain foreign language development programming gave the following reason for the curriculum gap: There is a lack of funding, outcomes are determined by decision-making at the district level, languages are not seen as a core component of an elementary school curriculum, previously existing programs are no longer feasible, and there is shortage of language teachers.<sup>7</sup> These reasons, though seemingly obvious, are plaguing advocacy for youth language development programs, making it seem as though intercultural communication competence is optional skill in our globalized economy, when in actuality it is a critical skill.

### **Sample Selection:**

Participants must not be of the MIIS population. The reason for this is that MIIS students and faculty are unique; they more often times than not

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<sup>4</sup> Chen and Starosta, 4

<sup>5</sup> Chen and Starosta, 362

<sup>6</sup> Pufahl and Rhodes, 262

<sup>7</sup> Pufahl and Rhodes, 262

had to have placed into a language program at the institute, or are involved language development or international teaching or administrating. The demographic for the MIIS population is likely to produce an unusually high yield of interculturally sensitive participants due to the nature of the inclusive, international community, and because students at the institute in particular are likely to promote their sense of enduring intercultural sensitivity by way of instilled professionalism (students are often prompted to speak directly and positively about their education and experience). This research study does not focus on the MIIS community for these reasons, and although teachers, staff and administrators of the MIIS community will not be tested, associates, friends, and family may be interviewed barring that they meet the simple and appropriate criteria, outlined in the methods section.

### **Key Variables:**

The key variables for the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale are already set, but in order to augment the results by the level of language tutelage, key demographic variables are simply added to narrow the target group. The first set of key demographic variables appears in the consent form (Appendix 1a), in order to set the parameters for the target survey group. They are as follows:

- Must have studied a foreign language between the ages of 3-18
- Must be older than 19 years old
- Must not be a current student of the Monterey Institute or alumni

Then, stripped from question format, the key demographic variables for the language tutelage questionnaire are as follows:

- The age of the participant when they first started studying foreign language in a classroom setting
- How many different languages they had studied in a classroom setting between the ages of 3-18
- The sum amount of years they studied foreign language in a classroom setting between the years of 3-18 (According to their memory)
- On average, the amount of hours per week they studied a foreign language before they turned 19 years old
- If they ever studied more than one language in a classroom setting between the ages of 3-18 (Yes or No)

### **Instrumentation:**

The entire survey, found in online format, is 30 questions long including the consent form. The tutelage questionnaire is 5 questions long and the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale is 24 questions. In total, the survey is fairly brief and simple. By design, the questionnaire is short and only lightly fatiguing; only asking one question that demands a summary of the amount

of years a participant studied. For the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, each question is to be answered on a Likert Scale of 0-5, where 0 correlates with Strongly Disagree and 5 correlates with Strongly Agree. The questions are directed at the participants' likelihood to empathize and interact with people from different cultures and to what extent they would feel comfortable doing so. The survey is finished upon completion of this portion of the assessment.

**Procedure:**

If and when the participant selects "Yes" to the questionnaire, the initial questionnaire is prompted. As part of the Consent Form, this assessment gauges whether the informed participant is of the appropriate demographic by asking questions concerning their age, education, and language tutelage. These questions help to focus the study in on the non-MIIS, adult population vital to the outcomes. In this way, the Consent Form helps to narrow the study to a population of Monterey not obliged to study a foreign language.

Participants who fit the appropriate demographic will then be asked a series of questions concerning their language tutelage. This section's questionnaire is unique to the Enduring Intercultural Sensitivity Test. It is designed to effectively categorize participants into levels of foreign language development by the scope of their study and the extent by which they have maintained their language acquisition. Participants are then fit into one of three categories: low, medium, and high language tutelage. These categories are designed to reveal a correlation between increasing levels of language tutelage and a more well-developed sense of enduring intercultural sensitivity.

**Timeline:**

Research is currently ongoing. The procurement of research data had series of prototype dates, including November 20<sup>th</sup> and December 9<sup>th</sup>, but has been pushed to January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014. The reason for this new cutoff date is because of the lack of responses during the initial timeframe. A new date will be set for the compilation and presentation of data accordingly after the new survey cutoff date has been reached.

**Ethical Concerns:**

The primary investigator is certified by the National Institute of Health (NIH) and focused on extracting data from an amorphous national population. The study is no way intended to be harmful or invasive to the target population. All questions asked are intended to tease out conclusive evidence correlating childhood foreign language development and a sense of enduring intercultural sensitivity in the adult. The brief study, intended to last no more than 5 minutes, begins with a consent form, detailing participant involvement and survey usage thereafter. In the rare occurrence of in-person surveying, the surveyor should be able to appropriate if the

participant is eligible for the study and intends to consent from the introduction, but the written consent form is designed to confirm it.

### **Hypothesis:**

If correct, adults who studied foreign languages more extensively as children will be more interculturally sensitive. In effect, the data will promote advocacy for foreign language development programming because the study will highlight character traits and competencies needed for effective intercultural communication and interactions in multicultural environments in the workplace and schools.

### **Research Findings:**

Based on the small number of responses generated to date, participants appear to be proving the hypothesis correct. Stemming from the assumption that learning additional languages to American English heightens intercultural sensitivity, the research study has begun to show a positive correlation (however inconclusive). To help determine whether or not the correlation is authentic, the study is age sensitive, focusing particularly on foreign language immersion in the formative years (K-12) and its lasting effect on participants older than 19. In this way, the research study has begun to capture snapshots of the participant childhood language development, levied against its potential affect<sup>8</sup> to increase intercultural sensitivity. Participants, by chance, have begun to show high levels of foreign language development in childhood, and also high levels of intercultural sensitivity. To be clear however, this study subjectively measures the participant's perceived intercultural sensitivity, which is likely to vary based on their mood and on their comprehension of the potential correlation.

According to the literature, the current state of the U.S. education system shows room for improvement in childhood language development programs and this research study has begun to prove useful for advocacy and promotion. Furthermore, it is showing a positive correlation between learning languages at younger ages and intercultural communication competency development,<sup>9</sup> by way of participant reaction towards the survey.

### **Analysis:**

As the principal researcher for this study, I have found that conversations surrounding the survey have proven as useful to answering the research question as the survey itself, which provided more quantitative analysis. In the accompanying reflection paper, I detail the process of what I refer to as "Survey Intrigue." In this section I explain how the mere premise of taking a survey that investigates enduring participant characteristics intrigues people. The problems faced with survey intrigue ultimately led to a series of survey design changes, which effectively pushed back the timeline.

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<sup>8</sup> Chen and Starosta, 362

<sup>9</sup> Chen and Starosta, 361

The analysis is that foreign language development programs are at least in the forefront of people's minds who consider it a vital part of their own childhood education.

### **Appendix 1a:**

*Dear Participant,*

*You are invited to participate in a research study entitled, "Developing Intercultural Sensitivity through Childhood Language Learning" This study is being conducted at the Monterey Institute of International Studies by George Payne as the principal investigator and Dr. Fusun Akarsu as the advisor. The purpose of this study is to discern if there is any positive correlation between learning foreign languages in youth development programs and any sense of enduring intercultural sensitivity from the experience.*

*In this study, you will be asked to complete a 3-section electronic survey. The first section will determine if you are a member of the appropriate demographic. The second will define the extent of your language tutelage. And the final will be a brisk twenty-four question assessment to determine your intercultural communication competency. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time. The survey should take approximately 8 minutes to complete.*

*There are no risks associated with participating in this study. The survey collects no identifying information of any respondent. All of the responses to the survey will be recorded anonymously. While you will not experience any direct benefits from participation, information collected in this study may benefit the field of education studies in understanding the relationship between language education and intercultural competency at large.*

*If you have any questions regarding the survey or this research project in general, please contact Dr. Fusun Akarsu ([fakarsu@miis.edu](mailto:fakarsu@miis.edu)).*

*If you agree to participate in the study, please select yes below to continue.*



**Citations:**

Chen, G., & Starosta, W. J. (1996). Intercultural Communication Competence: A Synthesis. *Communication Yearbook, Vol.19*

Chen, G., & Starosta, W. J. (2000). The Development and Validation of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. *Human Communication, 3(1)*, 3-14.

Pufahl, I., & Rhodes, N. C. (2011). Foreign Language Instruction in U.S. Schools: Results of a National Survey of Elementary and Secondary Schools. *Foreign Language Annals, 44(2)*, 258-288.