Towards an Intercultural Communication Competence Tool for Academic Mobility Purposes

Diler Aba

University of Antwerp - Belgium

Abstract

This research investigates intercultural communication competence (ICC) and its main components (affective, cognitive and behavioral) in relation to academic mobility. It also discusses the value of assessing intercultural competence in higher education and points out the relationship between academic mobility, foreign language learning and the development of intercultural competence. The discussion then leads to the development of an intercultural communication assessment tool for academic mobility: Mobile Students' Intercultural Competence Scale (MSICS). This tool focuses mainly on analyzing Turkish Erasmus students' intercultural competence before and after their study abroad experience. Even though many intercultural competence assessment tools exist in the present literature, there is a lack of materials in this context which mainly focus on analyzing mobile students' intercultural communication competence.

Keywords: *intercultural communication competence, academic mobility, Erasmus programme, foreign language development*

Introduction

In today's globalized world, the probability of encountering people from other cultures in our daily interactions is greater than ever before (Barnett and Lee 2002; Jensen 2003; Spitzberg 2000). Technology has made it even easier for people to communicate with others from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds, even if they do not have actual contact. However, relationships that are established on the phone or the Internet are frequently a prelude to face-to-face communication (Andersen et al. 2002). Abundant research has been carried out in the field of intercultural communication (i.e. Byram et al. 2002; Deardorff 2006; Sinicrope et al. 2007). Researchers have first tried to identify the distinct behavior traits and communication procedures in various cultures. Then they have tried to understand the intercultural communication (IC) needs of sojourners. They have also developed various materials which would assist sojourners while communicating with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. There have been ample investigations concerning IC in professional settings because intercultural communication competence has been remarkably valued in the business world (Fall et al. 2013). As Stier (2006) states, many employers today seek multilingual professionals with the knowledge of diverse cultural codes. Moreover, many employers look for communication skills as their top priority in employees rather than looking for specific training in a single field (Job Outlook 2001).

Despite the numerous investigations that have been carried out in the field of intercultural communication, there is still a dire need for new investigations because the available literature has often focused on IC in professional settings. The subjects of various studies have been mobile doctors, engineers and other workers whose professions are rather international (i.e. Intercultural Readiness Check: IRC; CEFCult Tool; the INCA Project). IC in academic contexts is as essential as IC in professional contexts. There have been rather noteworthy studies which investigated intercultural competence in academic contexts as well (i.e. Sercu 2004; Lussier 2007; Byram & Dervin 2008). However these studies often focused mainly on IC in foreign language learning because intercultural awareness and openness have been thought to have positive influence on foreign language development.

Studies of intercultural communication in academic domains have not been adequate to answer intercultural communication needs of mobile academics and students (Beaven & Borghetti 2012). There are not sufficient materials in the literature that concentrate on analyzing mobile students' intercultural competence. Since 1987, great reforms have taken place in the educational environments in the world. The number of mobile students has increased tremendously leading to intercultural encounters in the academic context more than ever before. One of the most important motives of this transformation was the commencement of the Erasmus Academic Mobility Programme. This specific mobility programme has been so extensively supported by various European organizations that the new Erasmus programme, which is called the Erasmus+ has received a significant budget of €14.7 billion for the next seven years, starting from 2014[1]. A striking part of this budget is dedicated to increasing mobility by supporting various mobility programmes (Van Heule 2014).

The achievement level of internationalization and mobility has often been measured by the quantity of mobile students and academic staff. According to Bridges et al. (2009), this situation has been detrimental for exploring the pedagogical aspects of intercultural learning and improving the educational quality of international experiences. They argue that a lack of planning and student preparation can cause the international placement programmes to become a wasted opportunity for all stakeholders. According to them, the quality of learning, reflecting upon and becoming interculturally competent are often neglected aspects of international mobility programmes. Moreover, the literature in the area of intercultural education warns that exposing students to international experiences without preparing or supporting them adequately to make sense of their intercultural experience can result in negative learning outcomes (Bridges et al. 2009; Coulby 2006; Sercu 2006). Guiding students before, during and after their study abroad experience and developing their intercultural communication skills is essential not only for the success of students' study abroad experience but also to attain the goals of international organizations (e.g. supporting European citizenship, training globally ready and interculturally sensitive graduates for the professional market, motivating understanding among the citizens of various European countries).

The following section provides a brief account of intercultural communication. It is theoretical and exploratory in nature and it aims to delineate the various components of and concepts related to intercultural communication competence (ICC). It explores the issue of ICC in higher education. The knowledge here is then reflected to the integration of intercultural competence in language learning and in academic mobility settings. By means of a critical analysis of ICC in higher education and its assessment methods, the paper initially facilitates awareness and ultimately proposes remedial strategies for improving mobile students' intercultural communication competence. Finally, this knowledge leads to the development of Mobile Students' Intercultural Competence Scale (MSICS): an ICC tool which aims at determining mobile students' intercultural competence level before and after their study abroad experience.

Intercultural Communication

From a general perspective, intercultural communication (IC) can be evaluated as a form of global communication because it focuses on a wide range of communication issues that appear among people from different cultures. It is not an idiosyncratic but an interdisciplinary study field. It accommodates different subject areas such as education, language studies, communication studies, cultural anthropology, social psychology, behavioral psychology and management (Espinar et al. 2012; Stier 2006). Intercultural communication mainly deals with interpersonal communication among people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It looks for ways to understand disputes, disagreements and challenges in individual intercultural interaction, and to produce solutions to these issues. It focuses on face to face interaction between individuals and groups with different perceptions of communicative behavior and differences in interpretations (Bennett 1998; Stepanoviene 2011).

Intercultural communication has emphasized the study of misunderstandings among people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, for it is a complex process and has greater potential for misunderstandings (Anderson et al. 2006; Barnett and Lee 2002; Philipsen 2002). Barnett and Lee (2002) explain that the process of social interaction in intercultural environments need not lead to reduction in uncertainty about the interactant's future behavior. On the contrary, it may lead only to greater uncertainty, frustration, anxiety and conflict. Arent (2009) states that communication across cultures is complicated because we tend to interpret messages in split seconds based on the past experiences and the cultural grids that were passed down to us in our home cultures. Miscommunication in intercultural contacts is a result of various factors such as stereotypes, ethnocentric attributions, political problems and unwarranted beliefs of universality, lack of language proficiency and cultural differences in non-verbal power behaviors (Andersen et al. 2002; Lim 2002). Moreover, interactants in various conversations may be seen as incompetent because they lack *motivation* to perform competently, *knowledge* of the competent lines of action in the context concerned, or the communication *skills* to carry off a deft interaction (Spitzberg 2000). Several competencies such as linguistic competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, attitudes and skills play invaluable roles for successful intercultural communication. However, none of them can alone account for failure or success of interactions.

Some researchers claim that monocultural communication is easier as this communication is similarity based: "common language, behavior patterns and values form the base upon which members of the culture exchange meaning with one another in conducting their daily affairs" (Bennett 1998:1). In intercultural communication studies, researchers focus less on the differences themselves and more on how the differences are likely to affect face to face interaction. According to Bennett (1998), this emphasis on interaction does not mean that interculturalists neglect knowledge about specific cultures: "on the contrary, it is considered a prerequisite for interculturalists to have expert knowledge of at least own cultures" (Bennett 1998:5).

Intercultural communication studies also focus on social attributes, thought patterns and the cultures of different groups of people. Power relations, which make an important element in intercultural communication studies, have not been given enough attention and have mostly been reduced to individuals (individual's competence) (Xie 2007). This constituent is significant for IC studies because power is historically and inevitably embodied in intercultural communication and it determines the criterion for appropriateness and effectiveness of intercultural interaction (Xie 2007). In other words, whose culture is to be learned or whose language is to be used in intercultural interactions is quite often influenced strongly by power relations. Martin & Nakayama (2004) state that "power is the legacy, the remnants of the history that

leave cultural groups in particular positions. We are not equal in our intercultural encounter, nor can we ever be equal" (123). Contrary to this view, intercultural communication has also been seen as the basis of democratic communication, the essence of which is respect for individuals and equality of human rights in social interactions (Byram et al. 2002). In this view, successful intercultural interaction starts with respect towards the other person and requires some positive attitudes such as openness, interest, motivation and flexibility. It aims at freeing people from their own logic and cultural idioms in order to engage with others and listen to their ideas (Unesco 2013:5).

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence can actually be considered as a synonym of intercultural communication yet it has a stronger focus on competencies. Hammer et al. (2003) defined intercultural competence as the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways. Interculturally appropriate ways of behavior can be exemplified as follows: behaving adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures (Meyer 1991); being able to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication, namely cultural differences and unfamiliarity, intergroup dynamics, and the tension and conflicts that can accompany this process (Canale & Swain 1980); being able to transcend ethnocentrism, appreciate other cultures, and generate appropriate behavior in one or more different cultures (Bennett, Bennett and Allen 2003), and being able to adapt one's verbal and non-verbal messages to the appropriate cultural context (sagepub.com). According to Sinicrope et al. (2007), all these terms attempt to account for the ability to step beyond one's own culture and function with other individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. As Gudykunst & Kim (1984) state, without understanding the stranger's filters, we cannot accurately interpret or predict their behaviors.

In the literature of intercultural communication studies, there is a lack of specificity and consensus among scholars in defining intercultural competence. In her 2006 study, Deardorff investigated the views of top IC scholars concerning a common definition for intercultural competence. She has found out that there is a variety of terminology used by administrators to refer to the concept of intercultural competence, including cross-cultural competence, global competence, intercultural competence, and global citizenship. Despite this variation, Deardorff (2006) upholds that Byram's 1997 definition is the most commonly accepted definition of intercultural competence: "Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role" (Byram 1997 cited in Deardorff 2006:247).

Deardorff explains that intercultural competence is a process and there is no one point at which an individual becomes completely interculturally competent. Therefore, it is important to pay as much attention to the development process as one does to the actual aspects of intercultural competence (Deardorff 2006). In the same manner, Byram et al. (2002) state that the acquisition of intercultural competence is never complete and perfect. For them, being a successful intercultural speaker and mediator does not require complete and perfect competence. Since cultures and languages are themselves changing, it is impossible to acquire or anticipate all the knowledge one might need in interacting with people of other cultures. Moreover it is highly possible that several cultures and languages coexist in a country and any language can be used as a lingua franca with anyone from any country. As a result, whatever is taught will inevitably become insufficient (Byram et al. 2002).

The process of becoming interculturally competent is quite complex. In addition to various competencies such as linguistic, discourse and socio-cultural competence, there are several essential behavioral patterns and attitudes for the development of IC (Alptekin 2002; Humphrey 2007; Parmenter 2003; Skopinskaya 2009). According to Byram (1997), intercultural communication competence requires certain attitudes, knowledge and skills. The *attitudes* that are mentioned by him include curiosity and openness as well as readiness to see other cultures and the speaker's own culture without being judgmental. The required *knowledge* for the development of IC is "of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (Byram 1997:51). Humphrey (2007) explains that knowledge is an awareness of what behavior is best suited for a given situation. It involves information about the people, the communication rules, the context and the normative expectations governing the interaction with the member of the other culture. *Motivation* is another important factor that influences the development of IC remarkably. It can be defined as having the desire to communicate in an effective and appropriate manner and refers to the set of feelings, intentions, needs and drives associated with the anticipation of or actual engagement in intercultural communication (Humphrey 2007).

Finally, the *skills* that are necessary for the development of IC include those of interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction (Byram 1997). Humphrey (2007) explains that skill is the actual performance of behaviors and having the ability to apply effective and appropriate behavior in a given communication context. Byram divides skills into two categories. The first is the "ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own" (1997:52). The second is the "ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (ibid). Both sets of skills obviously require the development of language competence. In addition though, skills of analysis and interpretation are necessary, as are skills of relating between different cultures, and the ability to put all these skills and knowledge into practice in real situations (Parmenter 2003). Furthermore, being an interculturally

competent communicator requires psychological adaptation (Penbek et al. 2009), the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behavior to elicit a desired response in a specific environment (Chen 1992), intercultural awareness and personal attributes such as display of respect, interaction posture, orientation to knowledge, empathy, interaction management and tolerance of ambiguity (Ruben 1976). Among all of the factors that are crucial for the development of intercultural competence, none alone can account for the success of intercultural interactions.

Clearly, the development and assessment of intercultural competence is complicated. There are a myriad of affective, cognitive and behavioral factors that play invaluable roles in this process. Some researchers even mention the impossibility of measuring intercultural competence holistically (i.e. Sercu 2004). Therefore, it is crucial to determine the domain of assessment and the specific variables to be assessed based on our research interests. As Sercu (2004) puts in, systematic frameworks for the operationalization of assessment of IC with specific focus groups become necessary. This is the reasoning that undergirds the development of Mobile Students' Intercultural Competence Scale (MSICS). By investigating the IC level and needs of particular groups with distinctive characteristics, we will be able to elicit data which will allow us to identify and address the IC needs of these groups more efficiently and with greater success.

Intercultural Communication and Foreign Language Learning

Foreign language learning has always been an important field for IC studies because intercultural communication by its very nature entails the use of foreign languages (Piller 2007). As it can increase intercultural competence, foreign language proficiency is indispensable for the development of intercultural communication skills (Olson & Kroeger 2001). Numerous investigations have shown that misunderstandings in intercultural communication predominantly result from limited proficiency in one or more of the languages of the participants in interethnic encounters, especially the dominant language, including limited awareness of different contextualization cues (Birkner & Kern 2000; Humphrey 2007; Kramsch 1986; Roberts 2000; Roberts et al. 2005). According to Lim (2002), language constitutes a system of representation for perception and thinking and could thus, to some extent, determine the nature of our thinking.

By all means, language proficiency is one of the centerpieces of successful intercultural communication, without however being the only one. "It is possible for learners to be 'advanced' in terms of proficiency in a foreign language yet minimally aware of, or comfortable with values and modes of behavior (e.g., communication styles) that differ from their own" (Jackson 2008:356). Various investigations have shown that increasing correctness in the target language alone does not increase intercultural competence. For example, in a study of native speaker reactions to learners' spoken interlanguage, researchers have found that learners do not improve the attitudes they evoke towards themselves and the content of what they say simply by increasing their correctness (Kramsch 1986). In a similar vein, Deardorff (2006) has stated that language alone does not ensure one's competence in a culture. It acts as a vehicle through which individuals understand others' worldviews, which is crucial to intercultural competence development, yet it still cannot alone account for successful intercultural interaction.

Catteeuw (2012) argues that monolingualism is a barrier to acquiring intercultural competences. For him, merely learning to understand another language opens a window to the other culture's world. In this view, foreign language teachers play an important role in improving their students' intercultural competences, as well as teaching them the target language. To manage this, teachers need additional knowledge, attitudes, competences and skills such as basic insights from cultural anthropology, culture learning theory and intercultural communication. They also need to be willing to teach intercultural competence and know how to do so (Atay et al. 2009). Naturally, without possessing sufficient knowledge about intercultural communication, teachers will not be able to integrate intercultural training into their curricula. Nevertheless, Byram et al. (2002) argue that teachers do not need to be experts in other cultures and intercultural communication. What they mainly need is the skills of promoting a classroom atmosphere where students will have the chance to take risks in their thinking and feeling about intercultural interactions. For Byram et al. (2002) the purpose of foreign language teaching with a focus on intercultural communication is not to try to change learners' values, but to make them explicit and conscious in any evaluative response to others.

All in all, there appears to be a close relationship between student mobility, the development of students' intercultural skills and foreign language proficiency. Many researchers (i.e. Bridges et al. 2009; Kitsantas & Meyers 2001) have asserted that this relationship is positive and that an international workplace learning placement or short-term student mobility program can be a profound intercultural experience that provides a unique opportunity to develop intercultural competence. However some others (i.e. Williams 2003) approach this claim with caution and argue that students do not need international experience as they can improve their IC in their home land too. Salisbury et al. (2013) argue that the evidence is less clear than what the rhetoric suggests. Despite the ostensible positive correlation between mobility and intercultural competence, it is still quite probable that the diversity of contact that the mobile student experiences has little influence on a student's relativistic appreciation of cultural differences or comfort with difference. Moreover, it is not easy to provide all students with mobility opportunities. Even when the students have the opportunity to study abroad, the results of the programme may not always lead to the desired goals. As Deardorff (2006) states, intercultural competence does not "just happen" for most; instead, it must be intentionally addressed.

Why Assess Intercultural Competence in Higher Education?

Assessing intercultural competence is important in higher education because it helps to measure the effectiveness of internationalization strategies and it also gives meaning to outputs (numbers) that are commonly cited as evidence of successful internationalization efforts (Deardorff 2006). Assessment of IC is also important because it has positive washback on teaching and students' motivation. However it is quite challenging to measure intercultural competence because some components of IC are either latent constructs or concepts which cannot be tested directly. *Latent constructions* are abstract psychological concepts such as intelligence and attitude. Behaviors of latent variables can be observed only indirectly and imperfectly through their effects on manifest variables. Intercultural attitudes, which are an integral part of intercultural competence, can be considered as latent variables as their observation can only be done indirectly. As a result, it is rather challenging to collect reliable data in intercultural communication studies. Several investigations have employed self-perception analysis tools which may not generate meaningful data since self-perception concerning attitudes and skills can easily be misleading. Someone who is interested in other cultures for various reasons (i.e. interest in international pop culture, having foreign friends or being advanced in a foreign language) may evaluate himself/herself as interculturally competent without having any actual intercultural experience or training. IC has also been measured with tests that consist of listings of skills or personal traits which are required to have successful intercultural interaction (Behrnd & Porzelt 2012). Such tests represent structural models of intercultural competence, i.e. The Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer et al. 2003) and the Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (Matsumoto et al. 2001). Despite their benefits in collecting reliable data for intercultural communication studies, these tools may not be regarded holistic enough.

Competence in intercultural communication has been measured by the appropriateness and effectiveness criteria. However, implications of appropriate and effective behavior can vary across different cultures. In other words, a behavior pattern which is deemed appropriate in one culture can be regarded inappropriate in another culture. According to Spitzberg (2000), appropriateness implies that the valued rules, norms and expectancies of a relationship are not violated significantly, and effectiveness is the accomplishment of valued goals or rewards relative to costs and alternatives. "With these dual standards, therefore, communication will be competent in an intercultural context when it accomplishes the objectives of an actor in a manner that is appropriate to the context and relationship" (Spitzberg 2000:380). Only a combination of appropriate and effective behavior will lead to competence in intercultural interactions. This combination cannot easily be attained because people are not innately aware of acceptable behavior traits for a culture. In order to develop intercultural communication competence, a person requires specific training and experience within distinct cultural contexts.

Challenges for IC Investigations

As in many other study fields, researchers face some challenges in intercultural communication studies. The most useful method for investigating IC seems to be observing participants in intercultural environments where they get into actual contact with people from other cultures. However this research method requires resources such as time and financial means from the researchers and dedication and motivation from the participants. Attaining these resources can be a real challenge for various scientific investigations. Carrying out investigations in specific academic contexts alone may not lead to the most desired results because it is possible that individuals are interculturally competent in a social context, but not in an academic context. Furthermore, individuals may have high levels of intercultural competence in one specific cultural context while having rather low competence level in another.

Concerning the challenges of measuring intercultural competence, there are also many intervening co-variables like freedom of action in a particular situation or intercultural competence of one's counterpart (Bertallo 2004). Naturally, all intercultural encounters involve interactants with different IC levels. It is highly possible for an interaction to fail even though one of the interactants is interculturally well trained and experienced. Additionally, ethnocentrism, dogmatism, rigidity, perfectionism, pure task orientation and communicative distance due to hierarchy have negative effects on intercultural relationships. Controlling these variables in many investigations is generally not simple (Behrnd & Porzelt 2012).

Finally, another challenge for investigations on intercultural communication is that the field of IC is rather disorganized. There is no consensus among scholars concerning a definition of intercultural communication. When there is not even a de facto definition for the main components of the field, it is a real challenge for researchers to devise their studies and attain their specific research goals. As Spitzberg (2000) explains, while each study portrays a reasonable list of abilities and attitudes, there is no sense of integration or coherence across lists. It is impossible to tell which skills are the most important in which situations or even how such skills relate to one another. As a result, the following question arises: Can intercultural competence be measured and if so, to what extent? According to Deardorff (2006), intercultural competence can indeed be measured, but it is important to measure IC for a period of time as opposed to one point in time, and it should be measured in its separate components. Deardorff thinks that the best way to assess IC is to use multiple assessment methods such as an inventory. Other recommended assessment methods, as suggested by Deardorff, are primarily qualitative in nature such as interviews, observations, case studies and standardized competency instruments.

Mobile Students' Intercultural Competence Scale

In the previous sections of this paper, intercultural competence (IC) has been analytically studied. Various aspects of IC have been presented and the relationship between academic mobility and intercultural competence has been discussed from an educational point of view. Moreover, a gap in the literature has been pointed out. That is, intercultural competence in the context of academic mobility has not received sufficient scholarly attention. As a result, the intercultural communication needs of mobile students have not been addressed thoroughly. Despite the existence of numerous IC assessment materials (scales, inventories etc.), tools that focus on mobile students' intercultural competence have yet to be developed.

The study up until now revealed some of the most substantial components of intercultural competence, specifically for the development of IC within the academic mobility domain. The findings have led to the development of Mobile Students' Intercultural Competence Scale (MSICS), and a framework which acts as a supplementary tool while analyzing the data which is collected through this new scale. The framework contains 35 statements that describe what interculturally competent students will be able to do. The statements fall within 6 main IC headings:

- Readiness (R)
- Openness (O)
- Solution-oriented Attitude (SOA)
- Behavioral Flexibility (BF)
- Interaction Confidence (IC)
- Intercultural Awareness (IA)

Each of these competencies has got further subdivisions that were designed to provide implications for analyzing the intercultural attitudes, knowledge and skills of mobile students (i.e. knowledge discovery; willingness to learn, explore and participate; welcoming strangers; respect for cultural differences; learning the language of the host culture; personal autonomy; cultural awareness). These six competencies in the framework may not be evaluated as holistic enough from a general perspective for intercultural communication studies. However, they have been determined to be the most effective components of IC in the academic mobility domain. Concerning the scope of this study, these items are sufficient to elicit meaningful data.

The MSICS consists of 32 items that fall within the competencies in the aforementioned framework[2]. The statements in the framework and the items in MSICS have extensively benefitted from the theoretical research presented at the beginning of this paper. Additionally, some IC materials which have been widely utilized in academic and professional domains have served as models: 1- Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) by Chen & Starosta (2000), 2- the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS) by Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994), and 3- the Framework of Reference for Intercultural Competence for Business Purposes by Catteeuw (2012). The MSICS has profited from these tools and inventories both structurally (the way the tools are organized and presented) and scientifically (information provided in the tools). Ultimately, a compilation of 6 competencies were determined and they constitute the basis of the MSICS.

Students' reactions to the items in the MSICS allow researchers to collect data concerning the students' intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills and expectations from their study abroad experience. The attitudes aspect of intercultural competence such as motivation, respect and tolerance take up an important place in the Scale (e.g. items 2, 3, 8, 9, 25) because IC development is claimed to start with attitudes: "the foundation of intercultural competence is in the attitudes of intercultural speaker and mediator" (Byram et al. 2002:11). As Deardorff (2006) has stated, attitude is a fundamental starting point for the development of intercultural competence. According to her, the attitudes of openness, respect (valuing all cultures), and curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity) are fundamental to intercultural competence. Deardorff has explained that it is possible to go from attitudes directly to external outcomes (2006). The items in the MSICS also elicit information from the participants concerning their intercultural awareness (knowledge) about differences (e.g. items 12, 15, 18, 30), their skills in adapting to the new environments' various features such as the new education system and the social circle (e.g. items 15, 21, 22, 30, 31), and their interaction confidence, especially in terms of using English as a lingua franca in the new country.

The Scale was created for an Erasmus mobility context because this programme has been referred to as the most successful and widespread academic mobility programme ("to be inserted after review"). The specific cultural context is Turkey, where academic mobility is extensively valued with a growing demand for the Erasmus programme. A Gunning Fog Index was conducted to test the readability of the items in the MSICS. The results have shown that the MSICS has an average score of readability. The items can easily be understood by the target group because the grammatical structures of the statements are not complex, and the terminology used is familiar to mobile students. Following the initial phases of the development of the MSICS, an item check was made and new items were added in order to have equal number of items for IC attitudes, skills and knowledge. Nevertheless, the attitude aspect remained dominant because of the significance of this component for intercultural competence. The variables are measured on an interval ratio scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

The scale is created based on the assumption that intercultural competence can actually be taught, and intercultural sensitivity can be increased through education. In order to increase mobile students' awareness on intercultural issues that may arise during their study abroad experience, to improve the students' intercultural competence and to assist them to completely profit from their study abroad experience; students should be offered training and tools such as the MSICS to reflect upon and analyze.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

In this paper, the value of intercultural competence (IC) for academic mobility has been studied. The paper addressed the question of why the assessment of intercultural competence is important in higher education, especially for student exchanges. It defined intercultural competence and provided analytical information about the various components of IC. The implications of this information for assessment purposes are also discussed. Finally, a new IC scale, which is developed for testing Turkish Erasmus students' intercultural attitudes, skills and knowledge, is briefly presented. This tool is developed based on the premise that mobile students are not prepared sufficiently for their study abroad experience from an intercultural communication point of view. The critical analysis of the IC field helped to determine the most significant variables of intercultural competence for academic mobility. These variables were collected under 6 competence headings: Readiness, Openness, Solution-oriented Attitude, Behavioral Flexibility, Interaction Confidence and Intercultural Awareness, and items in the Scale fall into these competencies.

This new scale (Mobile Students' Intercultural Competence Scale) is provided at the end of this paper as an Appendix. The information provided in this paper about the Scale describes the initial stages of the development of this tool but does not provide sufficient information as to how to utilize it. The Scale has already been employed in 4 different universities in Turkey (2 private and 2 government). In the 2014-2015 academic year, 84 Turkish students who would continue their higher education in various European countries with the Erasmus mobility programme responded to the items in the Scale. The data analysis has not been presented here because the Scale will be sent to the participants after their return to Turkey again. The comparison of the results before and after the study abroad experience will be of great use in identifying the changes in students' intercultural competence. The results of this investigation and more information concerning the validity and reliability aspects of the Scale will be presented in a subsequent study.

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Appendix

Mobile Students' Intercultural Competence Scale

Below is a series of statements concerning your intercultural communication competence within the academic mobility context. There are no right or wrong answers. Please write the number which corresponds to your answer into the space provided at the beginning of each sentence.

1. STRONGLY AGREE
2. AGREE
3. UNCERTAIN
4. DISAGREE
5. STRONGLY DISAGREE

1. I expect the coordinators in the host country and Turkey to always assist me during my study abroad experience.
2. I would like to join various cultural activities during my study abroad because they are great opportunities to learn about other cultures.
3. Even though I cannot receive ECTS credits from it, I am interested in learning the local language of the host country during my study abroad.
4. I would like to be in contact mostly with foreign students during my study abroad.
5. I feel more comfortable with students from my own culture than with students from other cultures.
6. During my study abroad I prefer to try restaurants which serve food from different cultures.
7. During my study abroad I prefer to go to restaurants where I can eat food from my own culture.
8. I think students from other cultures have many valuable things to teach me.
9. I think people in Europe are open-minded.
10. I prefer to wait and observe before forming an opinion about the students and academic staff in the host country.
11. I think people from other cultures are prejudiced towards my culture.

12. I think European students' communication style is different from mine.

13. Turkish students' communication style is better and more effective.

14. If the students in my class differ from me in the way they talk and act, it can create some communication problems during my study abroad experience.

15. I need to adjust my behavior during my study abroad.

16. It is difficult for me to change my behavior and living style in the host country.

17. I think listening carefully can help me to eliminate communication problems in the host culture.

18. I think the education system in Europe differs from the Turkish one.

19. I may experience some difficulties while adapting to the new education system in the host culture.

20. Communicating in English in and outside the classroom is a real challenge for me.

21. I can be comfortable while speaking English with my foreign friends in class.

22. When I communicate with people from other cultures, I sometimes tend to act differently than I normally would.

23. When I talk to people from other cultures, I sometimes feel constrained.

24. I hope the professors and students in the host culture will understand me easily because it is difficult for me to adjust my behavior.

25. I can tolerate different ways of behavior of students from other cultures.

26. I feel upset if I sense that my cultural values are not respected in the new country.

27. Sometimes I am intolerant towards differences.

28. I may experience personal problems (i.e. missing my family or friends at home) but I can talk about my feelings and share them with other students and my coordinators.

29. In case I experience problems within and outside the class during my study abroad, it is difficult for me to stay calm.

30. I have made some research in order to receive information about the host culture before starting my study abroad experience. YES/NO

31. I have participated in all the training and orientation activities organized by my home institution before my study abroad experience (please tick one of the options below).
All of the activities | Some of the activities | None

32. I believe my study abroad experience will help me to improve my skills in the following areas: (1 the most, 5 the least)
Academic | Social | Personal | Professional | Foreign language | Other:

About the Author

Diler ABA is a postgraduate researcher at the Research Unit for Applied Language Studies at the University of Antwerp (Belgium) and an English language teacher at Kadir Has University (Turkey). She specializes in intercultural communication competence within the domain of academic mobility. Her research and teaching interests include intercultural communication competence, internationalization of higher education, academic mobility and foreign language teaching.

Author's Address

University of Antwerp
Prinsstraat 13 - R202
BE 2000 Antwerp
Belgium
diler.aba@student.ua.ac.be

[1] See Aba, 2013 for more information concerning the transformation of higher education in the last decades.

[2] Please find the MSICS in Appendix