

Anthropocentric and Axiological Interpretations of Intercultural Communicative Competence in Modern Foreign Language Teaching Methodology

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Abstract: This article examines the anthropocentric and axiological dimensions of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) within the framework of modern foreign language teaching methodology. Drawing on the competency-based paradigm, linguistic anthropocentrism, and the process model of intercultural competence, the study argues that ICC transcends narrowly defined communicative skills and must encompass personal values, empathy, and cross-cultural reflexivity. Key theoretical constructs — including the "language personality" model (Karaulov, 2010), the "intercultural mediator" concept (Elizarova, 2005), and the process-oriented ICC pyramid (Deardorff, 2006) — are analysed and situated within the context of Uzbekistan's ongoing reforms in foreign language teacher education. The article contends that effective foreign language teacher preparation requires a paradigm shift from knowledge transmission to the cultivation of culturally aware, reflexive, and axiologically grounded professional identities.

Keywords: Intercultural communicative competence; anthropocentric approach; axiological approach; language personality; intercultural mediator; competency-based education; foreign language methodology; Uzbekistan.

Introduction: The intensification of global interconnectedness in the twenty-first century has prompted a fundamental reconceptualisation of what it means to be a competent foreign language user. Foreign language teaching (FLT) methodology can no longer restrict itself to the transmission of lexical and grammatical knowledge; instead, its overarching goal has become the holistic development of the learner's linguocultural identity (Zimnyaya, 2003). Within this expanded vision, two methodological orientations have emerged as particularly generative: the anthropocentric approach, which positions the human subject at the centre of linguistic inquiry, and the axiological approach, which foregrounds the role of values, attitudes, and ethical stances in language learning and use.

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has gained wide recognition as a core pedagogical category

in contemporary education; however, its precise content remains contested. A central question motivating the present study is whether ICC is reducible to communicative skills alone, or whether it necessarily incorporates the learner's values, worldview, and capacity for empathy. This question is especially consequential in the Uzbekistan context, where post-independence educational reforms — including the National Personnel Training Programme, revised State Educational Standards, and integration into the Bologna Process — have placed stringent new demands on the quality of foreign language teacher preparation (Karimov, 2012).

This article addresses the theoretical gap by synthesising anthropocentric and axiological perspectives on ICC and examining their implications for foreign language teacher education in Uzbekistan. The structure follows the IMRAD convention: the

present section establishes the problem and research focus; the Methods section describes the theoretical-analytical framework and review procedure; the Results section reconstructs the key theoretical models; and the Discussion section evaluates their pedagogical implications and limitations.

Research Questions

The study is guided by three interrelated questions:

- (1) How do anthropocentric and axiological frameworks reconceptualise ICC beyond its communicative-skills dimension?
- (2) What theoretical models best capture the developmental and value-laden character of ICC?
- (3) What are the implications of these models for foreign language teacher preparation in the context of Uzbekistan's educational reforms?

METHODS

Design and Approach

This study employs a qualitative, theoretical-analytical research design. The principal methodological procedure is systematic conceptual analysis of foundational and recent scholarship in applied linguistics, educational psychology, and intercultural communication. No empirical data collection was conducted; rather, the article develops its argument through critical synthesis and theoretical triangulation of selected models.

Source Selection

Sources were selected according to three criteria: (a) theoretical centrality to the anthropocentric or axiological tradition in language education; (b) explicit relevance to ICC as a pedagogical construct; and (c) documented influence in either Russian-language methodological scholarship or the broader international applied-linguistics literature. Primary theoretical sources include Zimnyaya (2003), Karaulov (2010), Maslova (2001), Elizarova (2005), and Deardorff (2006). The developmental framework of Bennett (2013) is incorporated to contextualise the internal-outcome dimension of ICC. European policy documents — specifically the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2020) — provide the institutional backdrop.

Analytical Procedure

Each theoretical model was subjected to the following analytical steps: (1) identification of its core constructs and their definitions; (2) situating the model within its intellectual tradition (anthropocentric, axiological, or process-oriented); (3) assessing the model's explanatory scope with respect to the three research questions; and (4) evaluating its applicability to foreign language teacher education in the Uzbekistan context. Cross-model comparisons were used to identify convergences and complementarities.

RESULTS

1. The Competency-Based Paradigm as Theoretical Foundation

The competency-based approach (CBA) emerged as the dominant framework for reconceiving FLT outcomes in the late 1990s and early 2000s, closely intertwined with Europeanisation of higher education standards and the development of the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020). Zimnyaya (2003) characterises CBA as a new paradigm that links educational outcomes to the learner's internal qualities, motivation, and value orientations. Crucially, Zimnyaya differentiates competence from the traditional knowledge-skills-habits triad: competence is not merely knowing, but the capacity to deploy knowledge purposefully in context.

Within this framework, ICC can be decomposed into four analytically distinct but interrelated dimensions.

Knowledge refers to the individual's conceptual understanding of cross-cultural differences, communicative norms, and discourse contexts. Skills denotes the flexible application of that knowledge in communicative acts, including the selection of appropriate linguistic resources and mediation strategies in problematic situations. Proficiency describes stable, experience-based mastery of intercultural communication that approaches automaticity. Personal qualities — including openness, empathy, tolerance, and reflexivity — constitute an indispensable affective-axiological dimension of competence. This four-part structure aligns the CBA with the axiological tradition by insisting that effective ICC cannot be attained through cognitive or skill-based training alone; the cultivation of appropriate attitudes and values is an equally necessary condition (Zimnyaya, 2003).

2. The Anthropocentric Tradition: Language

Personality and the Cultural Subject

The anthropocentric orientation treats language not as an autonomous formal system but as the medium through which the human subject constructs, expresses, and transmits thought, affect, and sociocultural experience. This tradition traces its lineage to Wilhelm von Humboldt's conception of language as the product of human activity and the mirror of the human spirit, and was radicalised in the twentieth century by Sapir and Whorf's linguistic relativity hypothesis, which posited that language shapes the conceptual categories through which individuals perceive reality.

In the Russian-language tradition, Maslova (2001, p. 7) encapsulates linguistic anthropocentrism in the formula: "to understand the human through language, to understand language through the human." This orientation introduced the concept of the "cultural persona" into FLT methodology and was subsequently elaborated by Karaulov (2010) in his influential theory of the language personality (*yazykovaya lichnost'*). Karaulov's model posits three hierarchically organised levels of the language personality.

The verbal-semantic level encompasses the individual's grammatical and lexical base — the traditional object of FLT. For Karaulov, however, this level represents a starting point rather than a terminal objective. The cognitive level involves the learner's engagement with the conceptual systems, worldview, and linguocultural stereotypes of the target culture. A canonical example is the acquisition of culturally embedded concepts for which no direct equivalent exists in the learner's native language — such as the English notion of privacy or the Japanese concept of *ma* (the cultural significance of silence and empty space) — as cultural phenomena rather than mere lexical items. The pragmatic level concerns the communicative participant's goals, motivations, and values. At this level, the learner not merely speaks the foreign language but thinks and makes decisions through it. Karaulov (2010) argues that when the learner internalises the target culture through their own perceptual framework, a "third culture" emerges: a unique intellectual and ethical space positioned between the learner's native cultural identity and the target cultural system. This "third culture" figure becomes a reflexive, tolerant global citizen capable of professional engagement across

cultural boundaries — an ideal that resonates strongly with Uzbekistan's stated educational goals of preparing internationally oriented specialists.

3. The Intercultural Mediator: An Anthropocentric-Axiological Synthesis

Elizarova (2005) operationalises the anthropocentric perspective in pedagogical terms through the concept of the intercultural mediator. The mediator is defined as an individual capable of finding a "balance point" between two or more cultural systems — a characterisation that unites anthropocentric (focus on the culturally constituted subject) and axiological (focus on value-based navigation of cultural difference) concerns.

Elizarova distinguishes the mediator from two superficially similar but fundamentally different roles. The assimilationist abandons their native cultural identity and "merges" with the target culture, thereby losing the very double perspective that makes mediation possible. The interpreter confines their role to the technical transfer of words between languages, without addressing the cultural contexts that give those words their situated meaning. The mediator, by contrast, occupies what Elizarova (2005) terms a "culturally neutral zone": a reflexive vantage point from which both cultural systems can be evaluated with equanimity and their respective values accurately conveyed.

Three functional dimensions characterise the mediator's practice. Linguocultural interpretation involves translating meanings and cultural contexts rather than words alone. Conflict mitigation requires defusing tensions arising from cultural stereotypes and mismatched expectations. An illustrative example: whereas tardiness in many Western professional contexts signals irresponsibility, an experienced mediator can contextualise the "local time" conception prevalent in a range of Uzbek social settings, thereby preserving the interactional relationship. Empathy and reflexivity entail understanding the affective states of interlocutors and adopting an outsider's perspective on one's own cultural assumptions.

Elizarova's framework carries direct implications for foreign language teacher education. The future teacher functions as a mediator not only in the classroom but across the full range of their professional activity.

Accordingly, lesson planning should incorporate the systematic modelling of intercultural communication scenarios, role plays, and case-study analysis to develop mediatorial dispositions alongside linguistic skills (Elizarova, 2005).

4. Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence

Deardorff (2006) offers a model that exemplifies the synthesis of anthropocentric and axiological perspectives in a process-oriented framework. Rather than treating ICC as a static attainment, the model conceptualises it as a continuously developing process structured around four levels, each of which serves as the foundation for the next.

The first level, Individual Attitudes, constitutes the axiological foundation of the model. The cultivation of respect, openness, and curiosity toward other cultures is identified as the prerequisite condition for development at all higher levels: without genuine interest in and regard for the other culture, the acquisition of knowledge about it is unlikely to be deep or durable.

The second level, Knowledge and Comprehension combined with Skills, forms the cognitive core. Central here are cultural self-awareness, deep listening, sociolinguistic proficiency, and knowledge of the conversational and discourse norms governing intercultural interaction. Deardorff (2006) specifically emphasises paralinguistic awareness (sensitivity to vocal tone and prosody) and nonverbal communication (gesture, facial expression, proxemics) as areas frequently neglected in formal language instruction.

The third level, Internal Outcome, reflects internal transformation in the learner. Adaptability, empathy, and ethnorelativism — the capacity to evaluate both native and target cultures from a balanced, non-ethnocentric standpoint — develop at this level. Bennett's (2013) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which charts a progression from ethnocentrism through increasing degrees of cultural awareness to integration, maps closely onto this level of Deardorff's framework.

The fourth level, External Outcome, is the observable communicative manifestation of the preceding internal development: effective, contextually appropriate, and mutually respectful interaction with members of other

cultures. A defining feature of Deardorff's model is its rejection of any terminal endpoint: even highly proficient intercultural communicators are understood to remain permanent learners, continuously refining their competence through new experience and reflection (Deardorff, 2006).

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Convergences and Complementarities

Across the four theoretical frameworks analysed, a set of convergent insights emerges. First, all four frameworks agree that ICC cannot be adequately defined in purely cognitive or skill-based terms. Zimnyaya's (2003) insistence on personal qualities, Karaulov's (2010) pragmatic level, Elizarova's (2005) value-laden mediatorial practice, and Deardorff's (2006) axiologically grounded first level collectively establish that attitudes and values are not peripheral to ICC but constitutive of it. This consensus represents a significant challenge to curricula that treat ICC as a set of trainable behaviours while neglecting affective and value-based development.

Second, the anthropocentric thread running through Karaulov's and Elizarova's frameworks reinforces the argument that the learner's subjectivity — their personal history, cultural identity, and meaning-making processes — must be treated as a pedagogical resource rather than a complicating variable to be standardised away. Karaulov's "third culture" and Elizarova's "balance point" both conceptualise advanced intercultural competence as the creative integration of multiple cultural perspectives, rather than the replacement of one cultural identity with another. This has significant implications for Uzbekistan, where a tension exists between preserving national cultural identity and meeting the demands of international professional communication.

Third, the process orientation shared by Karaulov (2010) and Deardorff (2006) implies that ICC development is non-linear, recursive, and potentially lifelong. This challenges assessment practices that seek to "measure" ICC at a single point in time and supports the adoption of longitudinal, portfolio-based evaluation approaches in teacher education programmes.

Implications for Foreign Language Teacher Education in Uzbekistan

The integration of these frameworks into Uzbekistan's foreign language teacher education system has both structural and pedagogical implications. Structurally, the reforms of the 2000s — including Bologna Process alignment and competency-based curriculum redesign — create an enabling policy environment for ICC-centred reform. However, curriculum documents that specify ICC as a learning outcome must be matched by corresponding shifts in pedagogy and assessment (Karimov, 2012).

Pedagogically, the findings of this analysis support several concrete recommendations. First, lesson design should routinely incorporate intercultural scenarios, role plays, and case studies that require learners to exercise mediatorial judgement rather than simply reproduce target-culture behaviours. Second, self-reflection and cultural autobiography activities — consistent with Karaulov's (2010) pragmatic level and Deardorff's (2006) emphasis on reflexivity — should be embedded throughout teacher education courses. Third, assessment rubrics should include explicit criteria for empathy, openness, and ethnorelativism alongside conventional linguistic performance indicators. Fourth, given Elizarova's (2005) insistence that the mediator operates across the full professional domain, teacher preparation should involve practicum experiences in contexts of genuine intercultural encounter, not merely simulated classroom activities.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations of the present study must be acknowledged. The analysis is based exclusively on theoretical sources; no empirical data on actual ICC development in Uzbek foreign language teacher education programmes are presented. The theoretical corpus, while internally coherent, reflects particular disciplinary traditions — notably the Russian-language methodological school and North American intercultural communication research — and may not fully represent the range of perspectives in, for example, East Asian or Latin American applied linguistics. Future research should test the theoretical claims advanced here through empirical studies using longitudinal designs in authentic Uzbekistan higher education contexts.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that intercultural

communicative competence, as understood through anthropocentric and axiological lenses, is fundamentally a personal, value-laden, and developmental phenomenon. The convergence of Zimnyaya's (2003) competency-based framework, Karaulov's (2010) language personality model, Elizarova's (2005) intercultural mediator concept, and Deardorff's (2006) process model establishes a robust theoretical basis for reimagining foreign language teacher education. A future teacher equipped with ICC in this fuller sense is not merely a communicatively proficient language user but a reflexive, empathetic, and axiologically grounded intercultural mediator — precisely the professional profile that Uzbekistan's internationalising educational landscape demands.

The theoretical synthesis presented here points toward a programmatic agenda for curriculum reform: moving beyond knowledge-transmission models toward pedagogical designs that cultivate the attitudes, values, and reflexive dispositions that make deep intercultural competence possible. Achieving this shift will require not only updated syllabi but also sustained professional development for teacher educators themselves, empirical research into ICC trajectories in Uzbek higher education, and iterative dialogue between national policy priorities and international best practice.

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