Intercultural Communication Anxiety, Intercultural Sensitivity, and Global Awareness in Japan, China and the United States:

The Mediating Roles of Culture and Language Competence

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Abstract: This study examined the relationships amongst intercultural communication apprehension, language competence, intercultural sensitivity, and global awareness of American, Chinese, and Japanese university students. A total of 584 students (198 from Japan, 188 from China, and 198 from America) responded to an online questionnaire. Results indicated that Japanese students had the highest intercultural communication apprehension, followed by Chinese and American. American students had significantly higher intercultural sensitivity and global awareness compared to Japanese and Chinese. The effect of culture on intercultural communication apprehension was mediated by language competence and intercultural sensitivity. Furthermore, for Japanese and Chinese, language competence mediated the relationship between intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communication apprehension, as well as the relationship between global awareness and intercultural communication apprehension. We discussed the results implicating the need for Japanese and Chinese students to become more apt at dealing with their rapidly internationalizing societies.

Keywords: Intercultural communication apprehension, intercultural sensitivity, global awareness, language competence

1.   **Introduction**

With the rapid development of digital and transportation technology, globalization has brought together people of different cultures, ethnicities, geographies, and religions in every aspect of contemporary human life (Chen, 2005). Geographic distance is no longer a barrier to interpersonal communication (Dong, 2018). With all these conveniences, the number of international students and employees has drastically increased in Japan and China. As an example, in December 2018, the Japanese government created a new status of residence named "Specified Skilled Worker," which aimed at "addressing the serious labor shortage in Japan by accepting experienced foreign human resources with specific expertise and skills" (Immigration Services Agency of Japan, 2023). From April 2019, hundreds of thousands of blue-collar workers came to Japan from eight Asian countries, including Vietnam, China, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, amongst others. In addition, the Japanese Ministry of

Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) provided support for the internationalization of the university, including the top global university projects, inter-university exchange projects, promotion of globalized human resources development projects, and global 30 projects (Support, n.d.). On the Chinese side, in 2013, the One-Belt–One-Road plan promoted economic cooperation between countries, and enhanced grassroots people-to-people exchange. On the higher education front, university exchange programs to foster internationalization initiatives have been implemented (China Daily, n.d.). According to the report of the Japanese and Chinese governments in 2019, Japan and China hosted respectively 312,214 and 492,185 international students (Japan Student Service Organization, 2019; Zou, 2019). While these two countries were relatively slow to internationalize, they are now desperate to catch up.

Due to the increasing numbers of international students in Japan and China, multicultural training became implemented in the teaching programs of universities. Students need to understand and accept cultural differences and then adapt to and integrate these differences when communicating with people from other cultures or countries (Chapman & Clenton, 2016). The intercultural settings in higher education "calls for the need of inter-culturally sensitive students" (Chocce, et al., 2015). Yashima (2002) concluded with a call that "foreign language education should be designed to enhance students' interest in different cultures and international affairs and activities, as well as to reduce anxiety and build confidence in communication" (p. 63). The need to gain language competence, intercultural sensitivity, and global awareness while mitigating intercultural communication apprehension is essential to the people of Japan and China.

This study looks at intercultural communication competence, featuring its three components proposed by Chen and Starosta (2007), namely, second language ability, intercultural sensitivity, and international awareness. In particular, we looked at the case of Japanese and Chinese, since we deemed these two groups to have high intercultural communication apprehension (Kowner, 2002; Lu & Hsu, 2008). The following sections will describe the variables we chose and the model we propose to elaborate on the effect of the three intercultural competence factors on intercultural communication apprehension.

2.   Literature Review

2.1   Language Competence (LC)

People may experience self-realization of having inadequate competence, and feeling high anxiety when communicating in a second or foreign language (Burroughs, et al., 2003). Here, competence is the adequate ability to pass along or give information and to make known by talking or writing (McCroskey, 1984). The use of foreign language is often implicated in intercultural communication; therefore, Lockley (2013) applied communication competence to the context of second language learning and its implications. Following Lockley, we define language competence as how well people perceive their ability to communicate in English with foreigners.

English as a global language has high ethnolinguistic vitality, and is the accepted medium in which foreigners would communicate with the hosts within Japan and China. While even being in their home country, Japanese and Chinese feel obligated to speak English to international visitors, although they may lack confidence in their English competence (Chung & Leung, 2016). According to Croucher (2013), higher communication competence predicts more

communication willingness and less communication anxiety, and vice versa. However, non-native speakers of English may feel compelled to avoid communication with foreigners if they feel uncomfortable or painful to speak in English (Dulay & Burt, 1977).

The TOEFL test score data in 2021 reported that the overall mean speaking score was 21 (ETS, 2021). However, Japanese and Chinese scores were 17 and 20 respectively, which is not only lower than this mean, but also lower than Hong Kong (22) and Korea (21; ETS, 2021). Due to the examination-oriented education in language training, Japanese students scored lower in speaking than listening (19), reading (19), and writing (18), and the same was found with the Chinese (listening 22, reading 23, writing 22; ETS, 2021). Students who lack English speaking ability are less likely to be confident and more anxious while communicating in English (Kitano, 2001; Yashima, 2002). This study proposes to verify this relationship between English language ability and intercultural communication apprehension.

2.2   Intercultural Sensitivity (IS)

Intercultural sensitivity (IS) is a dynamic concept defined as the "active desire to motivate [oneself] to understand, appreciate, and respect differences among cultures" (Chen & Starosta, 2000). Scholars from Communication, Education, and Psychology disciplines have emphasized the importance of intercultural sensitivity (Chen, 2010), concluding that it is essential for productive communication among individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds (Chapman & Clenton, 2016; Graf, 2004; Lee Olson & Kroeger, 2001; Moran, et al., 2007; Rosen, 2000). Interculturally sensitive individuals can project and receive positive emotional responses and outcomes before, during, and after communication, which leads to higher communication satisfaction (Gudykunst & Kim, 2002), and they recognize, acknowledge, respect, and appreciate cultural differences during cross-cultural interactions (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992; Chen, 2005). Therefore, it is a necessary component to foster the ability of the "global citizen" to overcome ethnocentrism, parochialism (Adler & Gundersen, 2008; Thorn, 2012), and communication anxiety.

2.3   Global Awareness (GA)

The third factor of intercultural communication competence, intercultural awareness, which we refer to as global awareness, is an essential component of being a global citizen. It has been defined as the "knowledge of globalization and the resulting issues and problems that affect everyone's lives" (Gibson, et al., 2008), implying having an understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of the world. In reference to global awareness, uncertainty reduction theory asserts that people need information about others to reduce their uncertainty while interacting, which provokes feelings of anxiety or apprehension in interactants (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; West & Turner, 2010). Likewise, Yashima (2002), in her description of international posture, included having "interest in foreign affairs and non-ethnocentric outlook on life" (p. 57), which could impact an individual's willingness to learn a second language (Lee, 2018). Siridetkoon (2015) found that immediate and future needs for language ability generated language learning motivation. Students need to acquire initial awareness before their intercultural interactions, to be sensitive to the general beliefs and values of the other culture to derive benefits from the experience (Gibson et al., 2008). In this study, we examine the impact of global

awareness on intercultural communication apprehension, and its relationship with the other two components of intercultural competence, language competence and intercultural sensitivity.

2.4   Intercultural Communication Apprehension (ICA)

When facing people from different cultures, people usually feel anxious and fearful of the uncertainty or unfamiliarity imposed by them. Therefore, intercultural communication apprehension is the "fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated interaction with people of different groups, especially cultural, ethnic, and racial groups" (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). Novelty, unfamiliarity, dissimilarity, or uncertainty can lead to intercultural communication apprehension (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). Intercultural communication apprehension not only inhibits uncertainty reduction, communication willingness, and second language learning motivation, but also decreases motivation during intercultural interactions (Lin & Rancer, 2003; Neuliep, 2012; Peng, 2014; Yashima, 2009). Thus, it impedes effective intercultural communication, communication satisfaction, and cultural adaptation (Neuliep, 2012). Students with higher anxiety were less motivated to disclose in intercultural communication and unable to adjust to a new cultural environment (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001; Neuliep & Ryan, 1998; Tominaga, et al., 2002). The above research findings suggest that intercultural communication apprehension is accounted for by intercultural communication competence, which includes our independent variables of language proficiency, intercultural sensitivity, and global awareness.

There are numerous studies about English language competence and intercultural communication anxiety among students in Japan and China, as well as research on intercultural sensitivity and global awareness about Japanese and Chinese studying in Western countries. However, there is less attention paid to host students in the Japanese and Chinese contexts. We cannot ignore this large majority, who have not engaged in extensive intercultural experience, such as study abroad, if we were to discuss globalization within the educational context. Therefore, the overall goal of this study is to understand the interplay of and the cultural differences in how they interplay amongst the variables of English language competence, intercultural sensitivity, global awareness, and intercultural communication apprehension, the role that English language competence plays, and factors that could impact intercultural communication apprehension. In this study, we targeted Japanese and Chinese students, while employing American students as a benchmark to which the former two groups would be compared (see Figure 1). Given the arguments from the above review of past research, we formulated the following hypotheses:

H1. Japanese students self-report their English language competence lower than Chinese.

H2a. Japanese and Chinese students are more anxious than Americans during intercultural interactions.

H2b. American students' intercultural sensitivity is significantly higher than Japanese and Chinese.

H2c. American students' global awareness is significantly higher than Japanese and Chinese.

H3a. In Japan and China, language competence negatively predicts intercultural communication apprehension.

H3b. In Japan and China, language competence positively predicts intercultural sensitivity.

H3c. In Japan and China, language competence positively predicts global awareness.

H4a. Intercultural sensitivity negatively predicts intercultural communication apprehension of students in three nations.

H4b. Global awareness negatively predicts intercultural communication apprehension of students in three nations.

H5a. Language competence mediates the relationship between culture and intercultural communication apprehension.

H5b. Intercultural sensitivity mediates the relationship between culture and intercultural communication apprehension.

H5c. Global awareness mediates the relationship between culture and intercultural communication apprehension.

H6a. Language competence mediates the relationship between intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communication apprehension.

H6b. Language competence mediates the relationship between global awareness and intercultural communication apprehension.
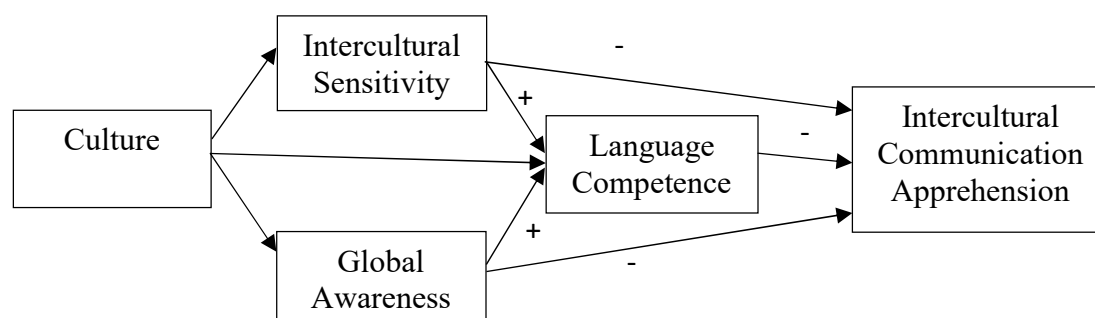

Figure 1. The Proposed Model of the Study

3.   Methodology

3.1   Participants and Procedure

A total of 583 university students from Japan, China, and United States with an average age of 19.17 (SDage = 1.50) completed an online questionnaire using Qualtrics. The gender composition of the whole group consisted of 258 men and 325 women. There were 198 participants from Japan (Mage = 18.95, SDage = 0.91, 94 men, 104 women), 188 participants from China (Mage = 18.29, SDage = 0.48, 92 men, 96 women), and 197 participants from USA (Mage = 20.24, SDage = 1.93 72 men, 125 women). International students were excluded from this study to assure a representative sample of each country. All Japanese and Chinese participants identified with their nationality in each respective country. For Americans, the ethnic background of the participants included 37.88% Hispanic or Latino/a, 31.82% Asian/Asian American, 25.76% White/Caucasian, 3.54% Black/African-American, and 1.01% others/unidentified.

The questionnaire was administered in the respective official language of each country (i.e., Japanese, Chinese, and English). We used convenience sampling to recruit participants after ethical clearance. Participation was strictly under full informed consent, including debriefing at the end of the research, and anonymity and confidentiality were observed. Participants received course credit for their participation.

3.2 Measures

The Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA, Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997) was used to measure intercultural communication apprehension of university students in Japan and China. We defined intercultural communication apprehension as the fear or anxiety people experience when interacting with others from different cultures or countries, and PRICA had the best fit for operational definition. There were 14-items rated on five-point Likert-type self-report scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach alpha) were $\alpha = 0.92$ for Japanese, $\alpha = 0.92$ for Chinese, and $\alpha = 0.93$ for Americans in our study.

The English language competence of Japanese and Chinese students was measured by a scale adapted from the Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCC, McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). The original scale used percentages ranging from 0% (incompetent) to 100% (competent) to measure language competence, but in our study, we used five-point Likert scales (5-very easy to 1-very difficult) for rating the respondents' ability. This scale was available in Chinese (Lu & Hsu 2008), having demonstrated good reliability $\alpha = 0.92$. As did Hsu and Huang (2017), we added "in English" at the end of each item so as to make it a measurement of English language competence. A Japanese version of this scale was also available (Kobayashi, 2008). SPCC scenarios included, "Please indicate how competent you believe you are in communicating within each of the situations described below." The items consisted of "presenting a talk to a group of strangers in English." We attained good internal consistency of this scale for both the Japanese and Chinese versions of SPCC ($\alpha = .94$ and $\alpha = .95$ respectively).

The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000) was used to measure the sensitivity toward cultural values and behaviors differing from one's own. ISS consisted of 24 items survey that included five different factors within intercultural sensitivity: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. In our study, since we could not confirm the original factor structure within either Japanese nor Chinese using both confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses, we used the whole scale as one factor. Measurement was done on five-point Likert-type scales from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree. Higher scores on the intercultural sensitivity scale suggested high sensitivity to intercultural interaction. ISS had been translated into both Japanese and Chinese (Chapman & Clenton, 2016; Hu, 2008), and in our study, the internal consistencies for the scale were $\alpha = 0.83$ for Japanese, $\alpha = 0.87$ for Chinese, and $\alpha = 0.90$ for Americans.

Global awareness was measured by an 18-item scale (GAS, DeLoach, et al., 2015), having four factors: global awareness, awareness of global interdependence, foreign language exposure, and geography and culture. Measurement was done on five-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 to 5, based on either agreement or frequency, depending on the item. This scale was not available in Japanese and Chinese, so we back-translated it into each language, through two bilingual translators. For the purpose of our study, we used the whole scale as the variable, not the individual factors. The internal consistencies for the scale were $\alpha = 0.84$ for Japanese, $\alpha = 0.81$ for Chinese, and $\alpha = 0.86$ for Americans.

4.   Results

4.1   Confirmatory Factor Analyses of the LC, ICA, IS, and GA

To test the factor structure equivalence of the scales across cultures, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) through multigroup simultaneous structural equation modeling (SEM) to see if the factor structures of the scales would fit for all three countries. For language competence, the CFA for the one-factor solution yielded goodness-of-fit indices that were adequate (GFI = .89, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .08, χ^2 (94) = 306.22) across the Japanese and Chinese samples, and did not require further analyses. The CFA for the one-factor solution yielded goodness-of-fit indices that were adequate for intercultural communication apprehension (GFI = .87, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .05, χ^2 (233) = 593.74), and global awareness (GFI = .84, CFI = .80, RMSEA = .04, χ^2 (423) = 940.37) across three nations, so further analyses were not warranted. For intercultural sensitivity, seven items were eliminated as they failed to meet a minimum criterion of having standardized factor loading above 0.4. The CFA for the one-factor solution yielded goodness-of-fit indices that were adequate (GFI = .81, CFI = .82, RMSEA = .06, χ^2 (326) = 1070.983) for all three cultures and did not require further analyses.

4.2   Cultural Differences Amongst LC, ICA, IS, and GA

For each scale, means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations were calculated. Table 1 reported these figures separately for culture. The internal consistency reliability coefficients for the scales showed adequate levels across Japanese (range .84 to .94), Chinese (range from .81 to .92), and American (range .86 to .93) samples. We ran multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) for differences in means across cultures, and a t-test for English language competence. We used MANOVA to minimize Type I error, and to test if it would be appropriate, we first conducted Bartlett's test of sphericity, which revealed χ^2 (3) = 744.18, p < .000. The results showed significant cultural differences across all scales. H1 predicted differences in language competence were supported (see Table 1).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability for Scales

	Japanese			Chinese			Americans			Differences
	Mean	*SD*	α	Mean	*SD*	α	Mean	*SD*	α	*F* (*df* = 580)
LC	2.36	*0.73*	0.94	2.76	*0.68*	0.92	-	-	-	-5.57*** (*t* (384))
ICA	3.63	*0.65*	0.92	3.02	*0.55*	0.92	2.27	*0.69*	0.93	226.16***
IS	3.16	*0.53*	0.87	3.54	*0.43*	0.87	4.02	*0.54*	0.91	144.00***
GA	3.01	*0.55*	0.84	3.00	*0.47*	0.81	3.41	*0.60*	0.86	36.33***

Note. *p <.05. **p <.01. ***p <.001. LC=Language Competence. ICA=Intercultural Communication Apprehension. IS=Intercultural Sensitivity. GA= Global Awareness

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001; LC=Language competence; ICA=Intercultural Communication Apprehension; IS=Intercultural sensitivity; GA=Global awareness

MANOVA indicated that there were significant effects of culture on intercultural communication apprehension, intercultural sensitivity, and global awareness (F (6, 1156) = 69.42, $p < .001$, Wilks' $\lambda = .54$, partial $\eta2 = .27$). Given the significance of the overall test, we examined the univariate main effects. There were significant main effects of culture for intercultural communication apprehension (F (2, 580) = 226.16, $p < .001$, partial $\eta2 = .44$), intercultural sensitivity (F (2, 580) = 144.00, $p < .001$, partial $\eta2 = .33$) and global awareness (F (2, 580) = 36.33, $p < .001$, partial $\eta2 = .11$). Post hoc comparison using the Tukey LSD test indicated that Japanese students were highest on intercultural communication apprehension, followed by Chinese and Americans, hence, *H2a* (Japanese>Chinese>Americans) was supported. In addition, American students were significantly higher in intercultural sensitivity and global awareness than Chinese and Japanese. Chinese students reported a higher level of intercultural sensitivity than Japanese, but no significant difference in global awareness. Therefore, *H2b* (Americans>Chinese>Japanese) and *H2c* (Americans>Chinese/Japanese) were supported.

4.3   Effects of LC on ICA/IS/GA, and IS /GA on ICA

Three sets of simple linear regression were performed to predict students' intercultural communication apprehension, intercultural sensitivity, and global awareness based on their language competence by combining Japanese and Chinese. With regard to H3a, language competence negatively affected intercultural communication apprehension ($R2 = .28$, F (1, 384) = 148.89, $p < .000$; $\beta = -.529$, $p < .000$). Other than that, language competence contributed significantly for intercultural sensitivity ($R2 = .18$, F (1, 384) = 83.66, $p < .000$; $\beta = .423$, $p < .000$) and H3b was supported. In addition, the regression equation was positively significant for global awareness ($R2 = .14$, F (1, 384) = 62.25, $p < .000$; $\beta = .373$, $p < .000$), and H3c was affirmed.

Multiple linear regression was used to test if intercultural sensitivity and global awareness negatively predicted intercultural communication apprehension. The overall regression was statistically significant ($R2 = .67$, F (2, 580) = 575.09, $p < .000$). Intercultural sensitivity ($\beta = -.79$, $p < .000$) negatively predicted intercultural communication apprehension, while global awareness ($\beta = -.04$, $p = .16$) did not. Thus, H4a was supported, H4b was rejected.

4.4   Mediation Role of LC/IS/GA on the Effects of Culture on ICA

To determine if the direct effect of culture on intercultural communication apprehension would be greater than the indirect effects via language competence, intercultural sensitivity, and global awareness, we conducted mediation analyses using the SPSS macro Process. Culture was entered as the independent variable, while the dependent variable was intercultural communication apprehension. Language competence, intercultural sensitivity, and global awareness were added as mediator variables, and the model was bootstrapped 5000 times. With culture as a dichotomous dummy variable (Japan, China, or America), indirect effects were partially standardized, meaning that we kept the original metrics of culture, while we standardized the coefficients from the mediators to the dependent variable.

The total effect of culture on intercultural communication apprehension was significant ($\beta = -.610$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [-.732, -.488]). Likewise, the direct path from culture to intercultural communication apprehension was significant ($\beta = -.257$, $p < .01$, 95% CI [-.355, -.160]) As was

the indirect effect of culture via language competence (β = -.137, p < 0.01, 95% CI [-.210, -.077]) and intercultural sensitivity (β = -.383, p < 0.01, 95% CI [-.489, -.278]), but not via global awareness (β = .000, p > 0.05, 95% CI [-.009, .009]). Therefore, H5a and H5b were supported, and H5c was rejected (see Figure 2).
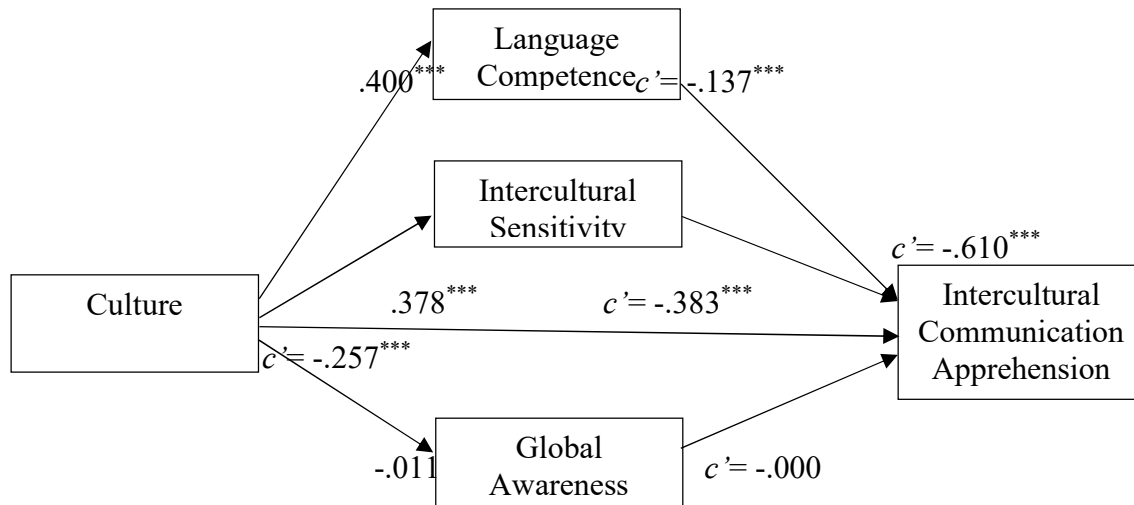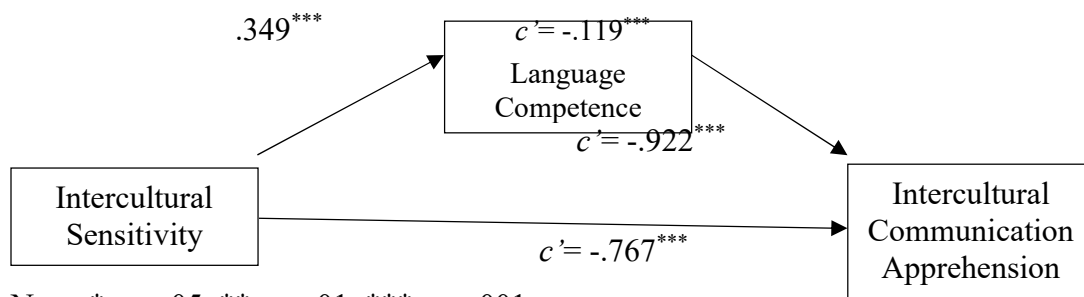

Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Figure 2. The effect of culture on intercultural communication apprehension mediated by language competence, intercultural sensitivity, and global awareness

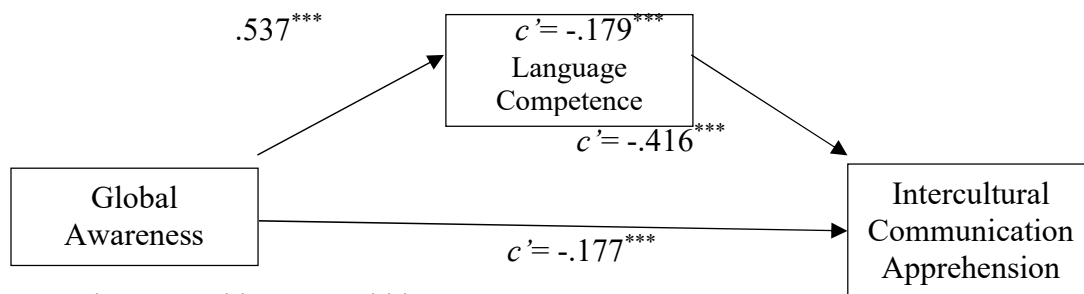## 4.5   Mediation Role of LC on the Effects of IS/GA on ICA

To determine if the direct effects of intercultural sensitivity and global awareness on intercultural communication apprehension would be more significant than the indirect effects via language competence, we conducted a mediation analysis. Intercultural sensitivity and global awareness were entered as the independent variable, while the dependent variable was intercultural communication apprehension. Language competence was added as a mediator variable, and the model was bootstrapped 5000 times.

The total effect of intercultural sensitivity on intercultural communication apprehension was significant (β = -.922, p < 0.01, 95% CI [-1.015, -.705]). The direct path from intercultural sensitivity to intercultural communication apprehension was significant (β = -.767, p < 0.01, 95% CI [-.863, -.670]), as was the indirect effect of intercultural sensitivity via language competence (β = -.119, p < 0.01, 95% CI [-.162, -.080]). Likewise, the total effect of global awareness on intercultural communication apprehension was significant (β = -.416, p < 0.01, 95% CI [-.543, -.289]). The direct path from global awareness to intercultural communication apprehension was significant (β = -.177, p < 0.01, 95% CI [-.298, -.056]), as was the indirect effect via language competence (β = -.179, p < 0.01, 95% CI [-.232, -.131]). For intercultural communication apprehension, the effect of global awareness was mediated by language competence. Hence, H6a and H6b were supported (see Figure 3 and Figure 4).

.349***

$c' = -.119$***

Language
Competence

$c' = -.922$***

Intercultural
Sensitivity

$c' = -.767$***

Intercultural
Communication
Apprehension

Note. * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

Figure 3. The effect of intercultural sensitivity on intercultural communication apprehension mediated by language competence

.537***

$c' = -.179$***

Language
Competence

$c' = -.416$***

Global
Awareness

$c' = -.177$***

Intercultural
Communication
Apprehension

Note. * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

Figure 4. The effect of global awareness on intercultural communication apprehension mediated by language competence

5   Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine differences in culture between Japanese, Chinese, and American students on language competence, intercultural sensitivity, global awareness, and intercultural communication apprehension; to investigate the effects of intercultural sensitivity and global awareness on intercultural communication apprehension; to explore the mediation role of language competence, intercultural sensitivity, and global awareness in the effect of culture on intercultural communication apprehension, and to verify the mediation role of language competence in the effect of intercultural sensitivity and global awareness on intercultural communication apprehension.

First, Chinese students' language competence was higher than the Japanese. Since we used a self-reported approach to measure participants' English communication competence, Japanese and Chinese students may have differed in their self-confidence regarding this competence, as the former self-evaluate their English speaking abilities very strictly (Shimamura, 2011). Moreover, Japanese and Chinese students were more anxious about intercultural interaction than Americans, while the latter were higher in intercultural sensitivity and global awareness. Having to function in a second language and coping with multiple cultural environments of novelty, conspicuousness, unfamiliarity, and dissimilarity could generate and enhance anxiety (Beatty, McCroskey, & Heisel, 1998).

Second, Japanese and Chinese students with higher English language competence tend to be less anxious in intercultural communication. Chinese students majoring in English were found to be less nervous about intercultural communication than those who were not English majors (Dong, 2018). Self-perceived language communication competence was consistently negatively related to intercultural communication apprehension across multiple studies (Bahadori & Hashemizadeh, 2018; Croucher, 2013; Jibeen, et al., 2019; Kitano, 2001; McCroskey & Richmond, 1976). Moreover, individuals with positive and high communication competence showed strong confidence in participating in communication activities (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). Therefore, people with more English language competence are apt to manage intercultural situations better, have higher adaptability, and attain more communication satisfaction. Given that, students with a higher level of English language competence might be more successful problem solvers, tolerate stressful situations more effectively, and consequently, they feel better (Mehrpoor & Soleimani, 2018).

Third, results indicated that intercultural sensitivity and global awareness positively predicted language competence in both Japan and China, which is consistent with the findings of Lee Olson and Kroeger (2001), who studied how they can enhance the global competencies and intercultural communication skills of educators. They found that intercultural experience increases their intercultural sensitivity, as well as their second-language proficiency (Lee, Olson & Kroeger, 2001). Peng (2006) also found that Chinese students who had greater levels of two factors of intercultural sensitivity, namely, interaction engagement and interaction enjoyment, were more proficient in English language. Therefore, intercultural sensitivity and global awareness can be positive predictors of Japanese and Chinese students' English language proficiency.

Fourth, intercultural sensitivity and global awareness negatively predicted intercultural communication apprehension of students across all three of our cultures. The results reinforced the importance of intercultural sensitivity and global awareness as necessary elements for individuals to be competent in intercultural interaction. Without sufficient information about one another during initial interactions, situational uncertainty or ambiguity may provoke feelings of anxiety in interaction (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). This is especially so in an intercultural situation, since anxiety often jeopardizes effective communication (Gudykunst, 2005; Kassing, 1997; Kim, 1988). Becoming more sensitive to other cultures, and reinforcing the global awareness should equip Japanese and Chinese students to psychologically and affectively adjust to the ambiguity and unpredictable nature of intercultural communication (Chen, 2010).

Finally, language competence and intercultural sensitivity was found to be a mediator between culture and intercultural communication apprehension, but global awareness fell short. This implies that the students' level of internationalization does not boost culture's effect on their anxiety. It was also noted that language competence mediates the relationship between intercultural sensitivity/global awareness and intercultural communication apprehension. According to Bhawuk and Brislin (1992), intercultural sensitivity is an individual's reaction to people from other cultures. As it emphasizes communication behaviors, the use of language cannot be bypassed. As Yashima (2002) claimed, students' international posture impacts their willingness of second language learning, which in turns decreases their anxiety of using that language. Overall, the results of this study accentuate the importance of English language competence, intercultural sensitivity, and global awareness in the globalization of a society through its reduction of intercultural communication anxiety.

5.1   Limitations

One limitation of our study was a sampling issue, not so much in Japan and China, since these cultures are relatively more uniform in character, but for United States. We used a convenience sample taken from a university in Southern California. The American sample, thus, was over-represented by Asian-Americans and Latino students. Our sample consisted of 31.82% Asian-American students, and 37.88% Latino/a, 31.82%, with only 25.76% Caucasian, and 3.54% African-American. These ratios for the entire US population would be 6.1%, 18.9%, 59.3%, and 13.6% (Quick, n.d.). Although it is virtually impossible to collect randomized and highly representative data in conducting any cross-cultural research (Gudykunst, 2002), sampling issues may lead to a skewed picture of the communication characteristics of the group.

Another limitation was that we used a self-report measure of Japanese and Chinese participants' English communication competence. These two cultures emphasize humility over self-enhancement, so they may have understated their competence. Perhaps a more objective index of TOEFL speaking scores or Oral English test scores would have been more accurate.

The third potential limitation was the imbalance in our cross-cultural comparison. While we featured two Eastern cultures, the USA was our only Western. While it was our intent to have the American sample serve as a benchmark for discovering differences between Japanese and Chinese, our assumption was that the Americans were sufficiently representative of the West. However, this assumption maybe too simplified, and ideally we would require a second Western culture to assure us that the benchmark was indeed a valid one. Future efforts would be better executed if there were multiple cultures, and not just one, representing a particular region or cultural category.

5.2   Implications and Future Directions

While numerous studies have examined intercultural communication apprehension, and the factors that impact it, to our knowledge, this study is the first to connect English language competence, intercultural sensitivity, and global awareness to intercultural communication apprehension, particularly targeting domestic students in Japan and China. More work on theoretical and practical implications are warranted. With respect to theory, our study has suggested directions toward probing into the mediating role of English language competence on the relationship between intercultural sensitivity (global awareness) and intercultural communication apprehension. A more elaborated relationship between these variables will facilitate curriculum and teaching goals toward internationalizing university students in these Asian countries.

In a more practical perspective, the results of this study can serve as a reference for tackling the issue of fostering university students' intercultural communication competence. The two Asian countries we surveyed are particularly in need of a more internationally oriented work force, with adequate communication ability to deal in, or work in different cultures (Lee Olson & Kroeger, 2001). The English language teaching in Japan and China focuses on practical facets and intercultural adaption, as well as raising language ability. While intercultural sensitivity and global awareness can be induced through training, students may not have sufficient language skills. The intercultural competence training in Japan and China should focus on the globalization of students and education, the methods which could increase students' communication confidence and enjoyment, the actions which could develop an awareness of

respect for cultural differences, and the approach which could reduce the anxiety and apprehension of students. It is crucial to develop culture and language-related courses and organize cross-cultural activities to enhance students' interaction capability and engagement, functional knowledge about other cultures, and lower their anxiety. The results of these studies can be a reference for future intercultural research in non-English-speaking countries.

Language learning and cultural training cannot bypass the motivation of students. A definition is called self-regulatory focus (Higgins et al., 2001), which includes promotion focus and prevention focus. Individuals can be motivated by personal goals, consisting of promotion focus (to be accomplished), and prevention focus (to be safe). Promotion focused people tend to be more active in their communication with others, while those who are preventive may shy away from intercultural communication events so as to prevent their self-esteem from being lowered due to their inability to communicate intelligibly. Japanese and Chinese students seem to be particularly susceptible to this, for reason of their emphasis on "face". Future research on intercultural competence and communication anxiety should take into consideration self-regulatory focus. Furthermore, we need to ascertain the underlying reason for the intercultural communication anxiety of Japanese and Chinese domestic students, and determining approaches to motivate them to communicate also deserves our attention.

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