

## **Bibliometric Analysis of Intercultural Communication Textbooks for English Majors in China<sup>1</sup>**

### **L'ANALYSE BIBLIOMÉTRIQUE SUR LES MANUELS SCOLAIRES DE LA COMMUNICATION INTERCULTURELLE POUR LES ÉTUDIANTS DE L'ANGLAIS EN CHINE**

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**Abstract:** This paper takes a bibliometric approach to the disciplinary development of intercultural communication (IC, hereafter) in the FLT field in China. The cited works listed in eight intercultural communication textbooks in English (published in China from 2000 to 2009) are used as the units of analysis. Discussions are presented in regard to the information revealed by the amount, type, frequency, and content of the cited materials. Three suggestions then are provided for further developing IC into a strong academic discipline, namely to construct a widely accessible IC-featured literature database, to increase interdisciplinary exchanges of research outcomes and theoretical advances, and to facilitate more indigenous academic research.

**Key words:** intercultural communication; bibliometric analysis

**Résumé:** Ce document adopte une approche bibliométrique pour analyser le développement disciplinaire de la communication interculturelle (CI, ci-après) dans le domaine de l'enseignement de langue étrangère en Chine. Les œuvres citées listées dans huit manuels de la communication interculturelle en anglais (publiés en Chine de 2000 à 2009) sont utilisées comme les objets d'analyse. Des débats concernant les informations révélées par la quantité, le type, la fréquence et le contenu des manuels cités sont présentés. Trois suggestions sont ensuite fournies pour faire du développement ultérieur de CI une discipline académique forte, c'est-à-dire

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construire une base de données généralement accessible, multiplier les échanges interdisciplinaires des résultats de recherche et des progrès théoriques et faciliter la recherche universitaire.

**Mots-clés :** communication interculturelle; analyse bibliométrique

The use of “Intercultural Communication” as a term in the FLT field in China started in 1988, when “a set of papers on cultural differences and their effects on foreign language teaching were published in the collection *Intercultural Communication and English Learning*(edited by Hu Wenzhong)” (Ke, 1990). At the same time, Wang Yuehan (1989) wrote an article to call on reform in the FLT field to make intercultural competence of language using a primary teaching goal. Wang Dexing, too, analyzed cross-cultural pragmatic failures in a paper published in 1990 (D. X. Wang, 1990). Yet, the term was used only in a sense of referring to a specific communication context, rather than as the name of a discipline.

The recognition of intercultural communication (IC, hereafter) as a potential discipline did not occur until the first collection of IC readings from abroad were published in China as well as several articles introducing the American IC field appeared in the FLT journals (see Chen & Dong, 1991; He, 1989, 1990, 1991; Hu, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1990; Jia, 1992). Up to now, IC has become a specialized area and direction in the FLT field. Professional associations are established and regular conferences are organized biannually. There are also listed programs at both undergraduate and graduate levels in the English colleges or departments of many universities. This rapid development of IC in the FLT field in China has led to the increased publications of various textbooks for language majors, especially students of English language and literature.

Textbooks can be a convenient window showing the status quo of a discipline. Evaluations and reviews of the styles, topics, and structures of textbooks often demonstrate the trends and directions of disciplinary development and encourage improvement in certain areas. This type of approach is normally specific and content-oriented. Yet, disadvantages of this kind of analyses are that it may be more promoting than critical; besides, it cannot cover many textbooks simultaneously. For example, Hu WZ (1998b) and He DK (1999) both selected no more than three textbooks in their evaluative studies and focused more on the differences in content and format between each of the books. It is appropriate and acceptable at the initial stage of development, however, when more textbooks are available in the market and when they resemble each other more and more in content (Chi, 2008), a thorough and critical analysis that focuses on common issues in these textbooks is urgently needed. Thus, this paper decides to take an innovative approach, i.e. a bibliometric analysis of the references cited by recently published IC textbooks in China. This study can complement the previous ones methodologically, and also, help gain new insights about what improvements should we make to the textbooks so as to facilitate further development of IC into a vigorous discipline. The advantages of this method are that 1) it can include relatively more subjects in research; 2) its data interpretations are less dependent on the researchers; 3) it can reveal what literatures have nourished the field from a historical perspective; 4) it can also shed light on future textbook writing with an aim of strengthening the disciplinary development of IC.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The goal of this study is to summarize the characteristics of literatures referenced in the IC textbooks in the Chinese FLT field. Therefore, five criteria are set up for selection of the research subjects. 1) The textbooks must be published between 2000-2009. 2) They must be introductory textbooks of IC, which exclude monographs, readers and others with a specific focus, such as intercultural business communication or training textbooks. 3) They must be written by Chinese authors and published in China (to ensure wide accessibility and readership). 4) They must be written in English (to ensure that the target readers are foreign language majors, and herein the English majors.). 5) They must include a reference list.

According to the selection guides, the author finally located 8 textbooks that match the descriptions

and used them as the research objects of this study. All references listed in the eight textbooks were input into a data file. Basic analysis, such as frequency and amount, was conducted, as well as content analysis of disciplines and areas of studies represented by the literatures in references. The following section will give a detailed account of the results.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The eight textbooks are published by seven different publishing houses (all are affiliated with national universities). The cities where they were published are Beijing (4), Harbin (1), Shanghai (1), and Xi'an (1). The breakdown of the types of referenced materials is shown in Table 1.

From Table 1, we can see that the total references listed in the eight textbooks are 389, or say 48 references for each. In comparison to similar textbooks in America, where the discipline is relatively mature, the difference in numbers of references is large. Take the example of the top five most cited American textbooks in this study as an example, the author finds out after doing some simple counting that the average number of references listed in each is over 400 with the largest exceeding 1500. Although the number of entries in the reference list is not everything in evaluating textbooks, it can be argued that, to a discipline that is as diverse and broad as intercultural communication, the range and number of references cited are indicative of the quality to some extent. Such a big gap between books published home and abroad is worth noting. On one hand, the gap may imply that current textbooks did not consult much academic studies and failed to capture the multi-disciplinary nature of this new field. If this is true, we need to encourage and facilitate more cooperated studies by researchers from different disciplines so as to keep them informed of relevant advances across academic borders. On the other hand, the large difference in numbers of references probably results from the fact that available IC resources to Chinese authors are scarce. This second possibility urges the establishment of an open database featuring IC literatures for IC scholars in China. This need, if not attended, may impede future development severely.

Another feature that is noticeable in Table 1 is that the majority of the cited works are monographs and chapters, which constitutes 87.4% of the total references. Journal articles only make 5.4% of the total. This is surprising as good textbooks not only need to cover the classics in a field of study, but also should give considerable attention to more recent studies, which is especially important to a newly developed discipline like IC. Most classics may be found in book forms, while new advances propelled by academic research often find outlets in journals or online databases first. However, the references identified in this study suggest that neither journals nor articles published online are the major sources for textbook writers. This citation pattern, whether due to availability or other reasons, is not a recommended approach to textbook writing. Furthermore, a careful look of the 21 cited journal articles shows that they come from 18 different journals. The most recognizable "flagship" journal in this field *International Journal of Intercultural Relations (IJIR)* (Hart, 1999; Hu, 1998a) is found only in one textbook. This phenomenon suggests that Chinese IC researcher either could not locate the most related journals or were not fully aware of what the major academic journals of IC are. Therefore, when they are writing the textbooks, they did not check specifically journals like IJIR or others. This again demonstrates a possible lack of access to prominent journals in the Chinese academia, which may be dealt with through submission to e-databases, such as SAGE or EBSCO; or as what is said previously, by accumulating resources locally. Another alternative way is to set up a specialized IC journal nationwide so as to centralize seminal articles for the convenience of the readers.

Since the general references shared by all the textbooks in this study are monographs and chapters, the author analyzes them further to see what are the most cited works. There are 37 references (83 entries in total) appear in the reference list of more than one textbook. Another 3 books have different editions cited in more than one textbook. No works is found to be cited by all textbooks in analysis and there are only 8 books referred to in 4 or more textbooks, whose titles are shown in Table 2:

Table 2 reveals those literatures that have the most influence in the development of IC in China. Among them, there is E. T. Hall's *The Silent Language*, which is considered the first book dedicated to the field and started the discipline (Rogers, Hart, & Miike, 2002). *Communicating with Strangers*, a

classic by the most prolific writer and theorist Gudykunst and his colleague Kim is also on the list. In Hart's survey of articles in *IJIR*, these two books are also ranked No. 9 and No. 14 in the list of most cited works (Hart, 1999). The rest books in the table are also famous textbooks from American academia that have been reprinted many times or having multiple editions. The last two Chinese books are the earliest textbooks about IC published in China, which also enjoy great popularity being cited by half of the textbooks in analysis. In a word, IC in the FLT field of China is mainly influenced by American scholars and their works. It seems that the publishing houses here are well aware of this and have imported most of these classics and make them available to the eager readers in the Chinese market. Actually, 5 out of the 6 foreign books in the table have had official photocopies available in mainland China now. Yet, this solely dependence on American sources should be expanded to include more books from other places like Canada, Singapore, and Germany, where multiculturalism and intercultural issues are studied intensively in different contexts that can be equally valuable to the Chinese researchers.

It is noticeable, too, that all books in Table 2 are textbooks except for Hall's. Actually, about one third of distinctive references (112 entries) are either American or Chinese textbooks or introductory chapters on IC (see Fantini and Smith's survey results of IC courses in the early 90's, 2006). This means that most of the materials in our textbooks are borrowed, second-hand materials. Although, it is common for textbooks to be more descriptive and general, such a large percentage in referencing the same type of resources (textbooks) in other countries is not normal. It may indicate that the originality of our textbooks is not enough and there is a severe lack of indigenous studies that can substantiate the content of a local textbook. This situation should be changed when the discipline becomes more mature and independent. Otherwise, the disciplinary identity of IC will always be "foreign" or "borrowed" and cannot root deeply in the Chinese context.

Finally, the author does a content analysis of the references cited (repetitive entries not included). The references are given labels that represent their main contents, source disciplines and focal regions. Then they are categorized accordingly into several groups for further analysis. Two features of the cited literatures have emerged in the process, which are worth noticing.

First, the most prominent contributing areas of studies are related to languages, including comparative linguistics between Chinese and English, English language teaching and translation. Altogether there are 73 references in this group. This testifies again from the bibliometric perspective that IC in China enjoys a close and profound relationship with English language teaching. Literatures in communication studies form the second largest source group, which include 62 entries. Among them, business communication and nonverbal communication are the most frequently cited topical areas and the rest mainly fall in interpersonal communication arena. Few literatures are related to mass communication or journalism. Other traditional disciplines that have benefited IC's development in the United States, such as anthropology, psychology and sociology are seldom found in the reference pool of the textbooks in analysis and each type makes up less than 2% of the total. Although the textbooks herein are written for English majors, it is still beneficial to include more other disciplines in reference. An interdisciplinary subject will lose its vitality if a narrow vision is cast on. Without input from social science, intercultural communication will remain at making superficial cultural comparisons and be deprived of the momentum for advancing theoretical probes. Thus, it is recommended that a balanced approach be taken to keep IC's special relations with foreign language teaching in China and at the meantime embrace ideas developed in other fields of study.

The other feature that the references have shown is related to culture-specific materials. This category covers 34 cultural groups, including countries, such as America, China, Arab, Japan, Britain, Australia, Russia and regions such as Europe and East Asia. Except America (18 references) and China (13 references), all the other cultural groups appear only once in the references as the major topic in a book or chapter. It is understandable that the focus of IC textbooks for English majors in China will more likely be on English-speaking countries. Yet the data show that only America takes the lead and the others (Britain and Australia) are not being paid enough attention. This may due to the heavy borrowing history of this discipline from the American academia, but in the long run, a broader vision will be more beneficial and should be encouraged. Intercultural communication need to be an embracing rather than prohibitive discipline. The American origin does not justify an exclusive focus and if we don't change this quickly, the development of IC in China will soon lose its vision and vigor. Certainly, detailed

description and study of one culture is also a valid approach to intercultural communication. Yet, judging from the list of references in this study, it is clear that most of the books cited about America and China are not serving that purpose. On the contrary, many of them contain only simplified and broad information rather than systematically evaluated cultural differences. Exemplary books include *American Ways: A Guide for Foreigners* and *Living in the U.S.A.*. Similar issue can be found in literatures about China, too. Few unique research topics are found in the reference pool and many are do's and don'ts books that focus on behavioral instructions or personal biographical narrations, such as *Encountering the Chinese* and *My life in China and America*. This is not saying that these literatures are not worth being cited. Rather, they are good sources for textbooks, but they are not enough. A substantial textbook for a discipline needs more serious and careful research and scientific studies to solidify its foundation. Introductory level textbooks should be the media to carry insights rather than satisfied with simple generalizations of cultural differences. Unfortunately, none of the eight textbooks used in this study made recognizable contributions in this sense.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, this paper takes eight textbooks written in English by Chinese scholars about intercultural communication as the research objects. Bibliometric analysis is conducted to see what the features of cited works are. This approach is chosen as a complement to other content-based textbook reviews for several reasons. First, it can include more research objects in one study; second, it yields more objective data; and third, it is sensitive to overall patterns in comparison. In the analysis, the author 1) explains why there is a big gap in the amount of cited works between textbooks in China and America; 2) summarizes which type of literatures is more often cited than others and what it indicates; 3) describes which field of study has informed IC's development in the FLT area in China and what are the topical areas that frequently appear in the list of references. Three common problems are identified, namely the scarcity of original and classical resources; the lack of indigenous studies and first-hand research data; few cooperation or exchange across disciplines. Suggestions are then given accordingly with an aim to strengthen the disciplinary development of IC in China. They are 1) to set up a resource database featuring on IC materials for Chinese researchers; 2) to promote more local research on topics closely related to the intercultural realities in China; 3) to encourage projects that include members from different disciplines.

A final word on this study is that it deals mainly the development of IC in the FLT field in China. While it may have a similar history in other disciplines, the problems and suggestions may not be applicable to other disciplines. For example, "cross-cultural psychology" was also introduced into China first through translation of American scholars' works and reviews of the history and status quo of it in the States (see Jahoda & Shi, 1983; Lu, 1987; Triandis & Wei, 1983; Wan & Tong, 1989). However, it has been given a disciplinary or at least a sub-disciplinary status at the beginning, which did not happen with IC in the FLT field. This difference may partially explain why intercultural studies in the field of psychology have better established methodological rituals to follow and more indigenous studies to rely on. Its maturity and solid progress have some referential values to researchers in the FLT field, which is beyond the current study but deserves further efforts to explore.

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**TABLES**

**Table 1: Amounts and Types of References in the IC Textbooks**

Textbooks	Amounts and Types of References Cited				
	Books/Chapters	Journal articles	Webpage	Other	Sum
1	63	13	0	2	<b>78</b>
2	81	4	0	1	<b>86</b>
3	16	4	13	2	<b>35</b>
4	84	0	0	2	<b>86</b>
5	18	0	0	0	<b>18</b>
6	18	0	0	0	<b>18</b>
7	21	0	0	0	<b>21</b>
8	39	0	0	8	<b>47</b>
<b>Sum</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>389</b>

Note:

1. As the purpose of this study is not evaluation of the quality, the publishing information is omitted and each textbook is represented by a unique code in analysis.
2. Other types of references include dictionaries, unpublished conference papers and thesis papers.

**Table 2: Most Frequently Referenced Books/Chapters**

Author	Title	Frequency	Year	Edition
Hall,E.T.	The Silent Language	4	1959, 1966	Original, Photocopy
Levine,D.R. & Adelman M.B.	Beyond Language. Intercultural Communication for English as a Second Language	4	1982	Original
Gudykunst,W.B. & Y.Y.Kim	Communicating with Strangers: An Approach to Intercultural Communication	5	1992, 1997, 2003, 2007	2, 3, 4, 5, eds.
Lustig,M. & Koester J.	Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures.	4	1993, 1996, 2003, 2007	2, 4, 5, eds. Photocopy
Scollon, R. & Scollon S. W.	Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach	4	1995, 2000	Original, Reprint
Samovar,L.A., Porter R. E. & Stefani L.A.	Communication Between Cultures	6	1998, 2000, 2007	3,ed. Photocopy Photocopy
JIA Yu-xin	Intercultural Communication (Kuawenhua Jiaojixue in Chinese)	4	1997	Original
HU Wen-zhong	Introduction to Intercultural Communication (Kuawenhua Jiaojixue Gailun in Chinese)	4	1999	Original