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Brief report

Validation of the short form of the intercultural sensitivity scale (ISS-15)<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Through the process of globalization, individuals are becoming increasingly intercultural sensitive and competent through exposure to cultural differences. To meet the growing empirical interest in intercultural communication competence and sensitivity, this study examined a short intercultural sensitivity measurement scale for use in contexts with limited time constraints. We abbreviated the 24-item Intercultural Sensitivity Scale to create a 15-item version (ISS-15). To permit its use in a non-English speaking culture, the ISS-15 was translated into Chinese and administered to university students in mainland China. Overall, the results indicated that the ISS-15 retained significant levels of reliability and validity. Confirmatory factor analyses showed that the short form fit the data better than the original form. The five subscales of the ISS-15 also showed acceptable internal consistency. Hence, the Chinese version of the ISS-15 was found to be valid and reliable for use in cross-cultural research settings with limited time constraints.

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As globalization continues to expand in the twenty-first century, the government and educational institutions have focused on developing citizens' intercultural understanding and communication capability to ensure they are well prepared for this new era (Wang & Kulich, 2015). The development of such a "global village" strongly demands intercultural sensitivity, which is commonly interpreted as the ability to distinguish how those from other cultures differ in their behavior, perceptions or feelings (Bronfenbrenner, Harding, & Gallwey, 1958). Given its importance in theoretical analyses of individuals' adjustment to other cultures, intercultural sensitivity has drawn great attention, yet attempts to measure this construct have not always been successful (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992). In this study, we examined a well-established instrument of intercultural sensitivity and validated its short form for future research use.

Intercultural sensitivity is commonly conceptualized as curiosity about other cultures, noticing and understanding cultural differences and willingly modifying one's behavior out of respect (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). The majority of the scholars in this field have noted that the more intercultural sensitive a person is, the more intercultural competent he/she can be (Penbek, Yurdakul, & Cerit, 2012). Various models and frameworks have been developed within the field of cultural studies, with the aim of providing a deeper understanding of intercultural sensitivity by treating the construct as a mind-set (Hart, Carlson, & Eadie, 1980), a developmental stage (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983) or an overall ability for intercultural communication (Bennett, 1993; Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992). Despite their different perspectives, these frameworks and models provided a foundation for the conceptualization of intercultural sensitivity. Chen (1997) pointed out that intercultural sensitivity is primarily concerned with emotions, although it is also related to the cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects

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of interactions. Thus, intercultural sensitivity can be conceptualized as “a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication” (Chen & Starosta, 1997; p. 5). This definition implies that interculturally sensitive people need to be self-motivated to understand, appreciate and accept differences among cultures (Chen, 1997).

In this study, we adopted Chen and Starosta's (1998) conception of intercultural sensitivity because their definition highlighted the differences from the concepts of intercultural competence and effectiveness, which offsets confusion in the conceptualization of intercultural sensitivity, and accordingly offers a clearer theoretical model to measure this construct (Tamam & Krauss, 2014). Chen and Starosta (1998) identified four personal attributes of intercultural sensitivity: self-concept (a positive outlook in intercultural interactions); open-mindedness (willingness to express themselves openly and to accept others' explanations); non-judgmental (holding no prejudices that allows one to listen sincerely to others during intercultural interactions); and social relaxation (the ability to overcome uncertain emotions during intercultural communication). Along with the development of the conceptualization of intercultural sensitivity, continuous efforts have been made to develop self-report instruments to measure the construct, such as the Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (Bhawuk & Brislin, 1992) and the Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer et al., 2003), to name the most popular ones. However, only the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) aligned well with our conceptualization by covering five elements that account for an individual's intercultural sensitivity, namely interaction engagement (7 items), respect of cultural differences (6 items), interaction confidence (5 items), interaction enjoyment (3 items) and interaction attentiveness (3 items).

The ISS has been examined in various samples including US, German, Malaysian, Turkish, Phillipino and Chinese (e.g., Awang-Rozaimie, Amelia, Aiza, Siti-Huzaimah, & Adib, 2013; Del Villar, 2010; Fritz, Mollenberg, & Chen, 2001; Penbek et al., 2012; Peng, 2007; Tamam, 2010; Zhou, 2007). Despite its widespread use, two major concerns have been raised in the literature with regards to the validity and practical use of the scale. First, a comprehensive review of studies using the ISS published since 2000 showed that many studies especially with non-English speaking samples have only provided minimal information about the performance of the scale before reporting the correlations between each of the subscales and other variables, such as reliability. This was especially the case for studies conducted with Chinese samples (Peng, 2007; Zhou, 2007). Although the overall internal consistency levels were satisfactory in most studies, the reliability coefficients of some subscales were still unacceptable (e.g., Awang-Rozaimie et al., 2013). Without a standard validation of the instrument, the application of the scale in non-English countries posed questions in terms of its validity. Second, the current literature provides very limited information about the dimensionality of this scale. Chen and Starosta (2000) proposed five interrelated dimensions of intercultural sensitivity and specified the scale items that reflected each dimension. If the scale is valid, this proposed structure should be evident in empirical work. However, past empirical studies have shown inconsistent results in terms of the factor structure: although some studies (e.g., Baños, 2006; Fritz et al., 2001) replicated the five-factor structure as proposed by Chen and Starosta (2000), others have failed to do so. For example, with Taiwanese students, Wu (2015) found four factors after via Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). This was the result of the removal of 9 items. With the same analytic approach, Tamam (2010) only found three factors with Malaysian samples after removing 3 items. This seems to suggest that a certain number of items in the scale might not be applied well to Asian contexts. Further validation of the scale is therefore required to verify the factorial structure of the instrument.

Further, a burgeoning research base supports the contention that intercultural sensitivity is associated with a wide range of cognitive and affective variables (e.g., Graf & Harland, 2005; Nieto & Booth, 2010; Penbek et al., 2012). Hence, it is very common to measure these variables at the same time as measuring intercultural sensitivity. Some researchers have adopted a developmental view of intercultural sensitivity, and suggested a continuum of stages of personal growth with varying levels of sensitivity of individuals (Bennett, 1986). To capture such a temporal dimension, researchers would need to measure the construct multiple times. However, the application of the ISS is limited by its length (24 items), when used as part of a relatively long survey package. Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt and Vogel (2007) pointed out that participants would not only lose focus when completing scales with a large number of items, but the level of participation and response rate would also be decreased due to the length of time required to complete the survey. One way to improve the research utility of such measures is to reduce the number of items and hone in on a smaller, focused subset of items without losing strong psychometric value. Thus, it is worthwhile developing a short version of the ISS scale.

In this study, we aimed to shorten the full ISS. This shorter measure will not only satisfy the practical concerns of researchers seeking shorter and valid tools for assessing intercultural sensitivity, but will also allow researchers to include additional measures of other constructs in the same package to widen their research scope. Therefore, we aimed to reduce the instrument by removing a certain number of items from each subscale, thus compromising between the need to obtain acceptable psychometric properties and pragmatic considerations (Schmitt, 1996). We examined the short Chinese version of the scale in a sample of Chinese university students.

## 1. Methodology

### 1.1. Participant and procedure

Three hundred eighty two students from a public university in Eastern China participated in the study. They ranged from 17 to 28 years old with a mean age of 20.24 (SD = 1.88) and 13.4% were male. Ninety-six students were eliminated from the

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