Interaction Competence
- A concept describing the competence needed for participation in face-to-face interaction

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Abstract

Face-to-face interaction has been studied both within sociology and linguistics, as well as within other disciplines. Often has the perspective been too narrow, something which is not compatible with the diverse and dynamic nature of this type of interaction. This narrow view prevents full understanding of interaction. Within this theoretical paper it is suggested that face-to-face interaction has to be studied with a broad perspective; when studying face-to-face interaction it is necessary to acknowledge its dynamic nature and therefore it is necessary to combine knowledge from different disciplines. Within this paper, I combine theories from linguistics and sociology in order to gain a broader perspective upon interaction. What has been missing from earlier research upon face-to-face interaction and upon the competence needed to participate in such interaction is not the knowledge of the different features of interaction but a will to connect them all. Existing concepts for describing the competence needed in order to be able to interact have often failed to describe the dynamic, multi-faceted nature of interaction; there has been a tendency to try to explain everything with just one factor. Within this paper, a more covering concept of the competence needed of an interactant within face-to-face interaction is proposed and sketched; a concept which I name Interaction Competence. This concept, which can be a valuable analytical tool for analyzing face-to-face interaction, has Dell Hymes’ concept of Communicative Competence and Erving Goffman’s and Ann Warfield Rawls’ concept of Interaction Order as building-blocks and consists of four main areas of competence: Control Body, Command Language, Handle Socio-cultural Knowledge and Understand Interaction Order. Within this paper also the affect of two interactant-external factors: the context and acceptability. Both are found to be highly relevant for the Interaction Competence of an interactant, thus the need for acknowledging the role of sufficient and acceptable Interaction Competence is seen.

Keywords: face-to-face interaction, Interaction Competence, Communicative Competence, Interaction Order, context-dependency, acceptability
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1. Introduction

Over the last decades especially, face-to-face interaction has been the concern of researchers both within sociology and linguistics, as well as within other disciplines such as anthropology and psychology. Linguists such as Dell Hymes, William Labov and John J. Gumperz have studied the social side of language, focusing upon language use within actual conversations, often in opposition to earlier linguists who concerned themselves mainly with language systems. Within sociology, interactionists such as Erving Goffman\(^1\) have been studying the micro-domain of face-to-face interaction and have focused upon interactive practises as creators of the self and of social structures. Conversation analysts such as Harvey Sacks and Emanuel A. Schegloff have tried to develop systems for interaction (see e.g. Schegloff 2007). However, most of the researchers have focused upon trying to explain small details within the interactive situation, such as the handling of ‘face’ (Goffman 1967), (im)politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson 1987, Culpeper 1996) or the structure of turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974). Depending upon the discipline the focus has of course been different. Within linguistics one focus has been language learning and acquisition and thus competence within a second or foreign language as well as how children develop language and interaction skills. Sociologists have mainly focused upon practises that are important for the social side of interaction. Detailed explanations concerning the different features of the interaction situation are of course necessary; in order to understand the whole one needs in depth understanding of the parts. In order to gain in-depth understanding of one part of the interaction, it is natural that discipline-specific research methods and theories are used. Still, what has been missing is not the knowledge of the different features of interaction but a will to connect them all; maybe due to fear of the models becoming too theoretical and too complex. I mean that there has been a tendency within linguistics and sociology in particular (as well as within others) to be unwilling to combine knowledge; rather it has been thought that the two disciplines have little in common in terms of similar ideas of the nature of interaction. Further on, this reluctance to cooperate and see the common goal that unites them; the will to understand human interaction, leads to a narrow view upon the nature of interaction. This narrow view prevents full understanding of interaction.

Especially as our society\(^2\) is becoming increasingly multi-cultural and multi-lingual, the concerns of the different disciplines within social sciences and humanities are becoming more intertwined with each other. Interaction happens increasingly often between people with diverse linguistic and cultural background and thus interactive situations are becoming more and more complex. Different types of knowledge are needed in order to gain a deeper understanding of interaction situations. I mean that it is necessary to acknowledge the dynamic nature of interaction and therefore one must combine knowledge from different disciplines when studying interaction; one should have a broad theoretical perspective and broad concepts for describing interaction. This is especially true if one wants to study interaction from a sociological perspective. As a sociologist, one should be open for the knowledge that other disciplines can contribute with; after all, the study of the social organization of interaction and society is multi-faceted. Within this paper, I combine theories from linguistics and sociology in order to gain a broader perspective upon interaction.

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\(^1\) See e.g. Goffman (1959, 1967).
\(^2\) I speak here mainly about Sweden, who until quite recently have been a mainly homogenous society but during the last fifty years have experienced an increase in immigrants from different parts of the world.
To make the terminology simpler and to unite knowledge from two disciplines; (socio)linguistics and sociology\(^3\) in order to contribute to the understanding of face-to-face interaction, I suggest introducing a more covering concept of the competence needed of an interactant, which I name Interaction Competence (hereafter IC). The purpose of this paper is to make an outline of the concept of IC, to look deeper into two building-blocks of the concept, each describing a different part of the IC, and to discuss the influence of two interactant-external factors\(^4\) upon IC.

This paper is solely concerned with the domain of face-to-face interaction, thus my model is only intended to help explain the competence needed within this kind of interaction. Other interactive and communicative practises can not be covered within the frame of this paper\(^5\). Face-to-face interaction, a much older practise than for example interactions via internet, phone or even writing, is the most basic type of interaction with regards to the organization of social life and this is the reason for the focus of this paper. It is to be understood that whenever I use the word ‘interaction’ in this paper I mean face-to-face interaction, not all types of interactive practises\(^6\). It is also important to point out that this paper is purely theoretical, with the purpose of sketching the concept of Interaction Competence as a theoretical concept and possibly as an analytical tool to be used to understand face-to-face interaction.

Loosely IC is about the knowledge and abilities needed of an interactant in order to be able to interact with others. Within this paper, ‘competence’, unless explicitly stated otherwise, is taken to mean ability both as knowledge and as use. “Knowledge” here is taken to mean both explicit knowledge (what an interactant is aware that s/he knows) and implicit knowledge, which is knowledge more in the direction of being sub-conscious\(^7\). The level of awareness is different depending on what area it concerns; for example it might be easier to be aware of which words are suitable for one situation and not for another but harder to be aware of the fact the one’s body language might change depending on the situation. There is also the obvious difference between self-awareness and awareness of the meaning of the acts of others. These ‘knowledge and abilities’ concern all parts of the interaction. IC is an inherently multi-dimensional and cross-disciplinary concept as interaction is a phenomenon that forms the basis of everything that concerns human behaviour. This is also why this concept is relevant to researchers within all disciplines concerned with the behaviour of humans. Thus I see the need for co-operation over the borders of the disciplines in order to be able to study interaction from a broad perspective. I propose the following outline of IC:

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\(^3\) I am of the general opinion that these two disciplines have a lot to learn from each other concerning ways of interpreting interaction/communication.

\(^4\) This should be understood as factors from the surrounding environment; in opposition to aspects of IC, which are interactant-internal.

\(^5\) Even though one can speculate that the here-proposed concept may, with some small changes, be able to account for competence within these other interactive practises as well.

\(^6\) I use the terms ‘interaction’ and ‘face-to-face interaction’ interchangeably throughout the paper.

\(^7\) It may often be something in between; not completely conscious knowledge but rather something which is in between explicit and sub-conscious knowledge, a kind of implicit knowledge.
As can be seen in the model above, I identify four main parts of IC and thus through these I have created a primary division of the concept. As can be seen in the model below these four are Control Body, Command Language, Handle Socio-cultural Knowledge and Understand Interaction Order. These four are what I call the main areas of competence. With this should be understood that these are the main areas within which one needs to have competence in order to have Interaction Competence, i.e. be able to interact without greater difficulties.

To Control body includes everything concerned with body language, movement and how one works in a physical sense. This can be seen as the physical, non-verbal part of the interaction. To Command language includes knowledge of and ability for use of all linguistic features; i.e. everything connected to the use of verbal language within interaction. Handling socio-cultural knowledge is having knowledge about the culturally and socially accepted behaviour and the social structure outside of the interaction. To be able to understand Interaction Order is about knowledge of the structure of interaction as a whole, for example understanding and using the correct turn-taking patterns. The reason for choosing this division including these four areas of competence is explained below, as it stems from the two building blocks that my concept is based upon. All the factors of the model need to be studied in order to acquire more than a rudimentary understanding of interaction. The four parts do not make up IC only in themselves but they also influence each other. Thus they should not be seen as completely free-standing elements, which can be studied in isolation. An important part of understanding IC and its influence within interaction is to understand the links between the areas of competence.

For constructing this concept within the frame of this paper, I have used two building blocks, namely Dell Hymes’ socio-linguistic concept Communicative Competence (and the developments made by e.g. Young 2000 under the name of interactional competence) and the sociological concept of Interaction Order, as it has been developed by Erving Goffman and Anne Warfield Rawls. The reason for this choice is that I see these two building-blocks as fruitful for the sociological study of face-to-face interaction; they have an interactive and social perspective upon language and interaction structure respectively. The concept of Communicative Competence covers linguistic competence, a very important aspect of

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8 These will be developed and divided further in section 4.
9 See e.g. Sacks, Scheglov & Jefferson (1974).
interaction, which is a highly relevant domain for the sociological study of interaction. In order to be able to understand Interaction Order, although it is essentially about interaction structure, one needs to be able to handle socio-cultural knowledge and to be able to control body. Thus these two building-blocks, when combined, give me the four areas of competence and complement each other, giving a more adequate picture of the aspects that are important for success in interaction. Having Interaction Competence is about being able to interact without greater frictions within the interaction situation. The Interaction Competence, interactant-internal competence is dependent upon (at least) two factors that are external to the interactant; the social context (i.e. situation type, participants etc.) and upon the acceptability of the participants’ Interaction Competence; i.e. if other participants can accept one as interaction competent.

The structure of this paper is as follows: It is divided into five main sections, from which this introduction forms the first one. Within section 2, two of the building-blocks of the concept of IC will be presented, discussed and evaluated. The purpose of this section is to clarify the need of the broader concept of IC, as each of the building-blocks in isolation cannot fully describe the necessary aspects of interaction an interactant has to master in order to be able to interact. Section 2 is divided into two main parts; section 2.1 is concerned with the concept of Communicative Competence, created by Dell Hymes, and some of its developments, and section 2.2 treats the concept of Interaction Order, created by Erving Goffman and developed by Anne Warfield Rawls. Section 3 is divided into two subsections and discusses the effect of the factors of context and acceptability for the concept of IC and introduces the notion of sufficient and acceptable IC; these are very important notions within the concept, as IC is not a static property existing in isolation within a person but a highly dynamic and interactive competence. Section 4 describes the concept of IC more in detail, using the knowledge from the preceding sections. Finally, section 5 makes some concluding remarks.

2. Two Building-blocks of the concept of Interaction Competence

Within this section the two building-blocks of my concept of Interaction Competence will be explored, Hymes’ Communicative Competence (and the development made by Young (2000) under the name of interactional competence) and the concept of Interaction Order as it has been developed by Goffman and Rawls, and it will be explained why none of them in isolation can be adequate for describing the competence needed within face-to-face interaction. I have chosen these concepts as they complement each other, something which will be seen within this section. This chapter is divided into two main sub-sections, one for each building block. These, in turn, are each divided into three further sub-sections.

2.1 Communicative Competence

Wilson & Sabee (2003) write that “Communicative competence has been defined in widely divergent ways” (Wilson & Sabee, 2003:4). Because of the limited space within the frame of this paper, I have chosen one definition, namely the one made by Dell Hymes. His

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10 One which requires more detailed study and focus than most sociologists give it.
11 Even though the areas of social-cultural knowledge and body will not be treated in detail within this paper.
definition can be seen as ‘the original’\textsuperscript{12}. This section describes Hymes’ concept and discusses its uses as a starting point for a concept of the competence needed in interaction and then moves on to look at some developments of his concepts, which have used the name ‘interactional competence. The section concludes with a discussion of strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. I will argue that, even though Hymes’ concept, and the developments of it, has its uses, it is not completely adequate for describing the competence needed to be able to interact. However, as will be seen (see \textit{4. Interaction Competence}), his concept can form a part of my concept of IC and through that be relevant for and add valuable knowledge to the sociological study of interaction as well as being useful for other disciplines, which is the main reason for choosing this concept.

\subsection{Hymes’ Communicative Competence}

Hymes’ basic theoretical perspective, upon which his concept \textit{Communicative Competence}\textsuperscript{13} (further on CC) is based, can be defined as a sociolinguistic one: “[a] model of language must design it with a face toward communicative conduct and social life” (Hymes, 2001[1972]:60). Thus, he is not interested in describing some kind of objective competence within a person in isolation. Because of this perspective, this view on language, I argue that his concept \textit{could be} relevant to sociologists and therefore for this paper. Drawing upon insights from sociolinguists has a possibility of adding to sociology and because of this I have chosen Hymes’ concept as a starting point for this paper about understanding the competence needed in order to be able to participate in interaction.

Shortly put, CC, according to Hymes, is about the knowledge and usage of language in the way that is \textit{suitable} for the communicative situation; ‘competence’ which means to be aware of the fact that different situations demand different types of language use (Hymes, 2001[1972]:71). Important to note is that this focuses on language as something that one not only has to know but also need to be able to use: “competence is dependent upon both (tacit) knowledge and (ability for) use” (Hymes, 2001[1972]:64). CC is thus different from pure knowledge of a language; a person who has theoretical knowledge of a language (vocabulary, grammar etc.) but can not put this knowledge to proper use does not have the needed CC in order to be able to communicate in that language. There is the “idea that the communicative behavior within a community is analyzable in terms of determinate ways of speaking, that the communicative competence of persons comprises in part a knowledge of determinate ways of speaking” (Hymes 2003[1967]:40); i.e. in order to be a ‘competent speaker’ one needs to know about and use the determinate ways of speaking in that language/speech community. Thus having CC, according to Hymes, is about following \textit{the norms of language use} in a specific speech community. Apparently, although promising in its view upon \textit{language as use} and not as abstract knowledge, which implies that language is, at least partly, socially created; this is still far from having a clear sociological relevance. Is it then possible to find this relevance when looking deeper into the concept?

Hymes writes further, concerning children learning their first/native language that “they develop a general theory of the speaking appropriate in their community, which they employ,

\textsuperscript{12}Hymes himself states that “Indeed, the term “communicative competence” has slipped into general usage without need of attribution” (Hymes 1985:13). This may be overly modest; the concept is still mainly ascribed to him and further on when referring to Communicative Competence, what is meant is Hymes’ concept.

\textsuperscript{13}See e.g. Hymes (2001[1972]) and Hymes (2003[1967]) for further reading. In these articles can one clearly see the context of which his concept was created, as an opposition to Noam Chomsky’s division of language in \textit{competence} (language knowledge) and \textit{performance} (language use) where competence was seen to be language in its ‘pure’ form and performance a weak copy of it. It is possible that the main problems with Hymes’ concept stems from the tradition within which it was created. For more about the theory of Chomsky see e.g. Chomsky (1965).
like other forms of tacit cultural knowledge (competence) in conducting and interpreting social life” (Hymes, 2001[1972]:61). CC is thus something developed from living in the community and something which is learned in much the same way as one learns (and integrates) other norms and behaviours ‘regulating’ social life. From this quotation, though, it can also be read that Hymes’ CC is something else than and separated from knowledge about the culture of the community, i.e. CC is a specific knowledge connected to language as it is the ability to use this ‘theory of the appropriate way of speaking’, thus as something connected primarily with verbal communication. Hymes does not mention the role of other types of communicative features such as body language, which is not surprising, considering his place within the discipline of linguistics, where focus by definition is on verbal language\(^\text{14}\).

Because of his sociolinguistic starting point it is natural that Hymes sees CC as something integrated with other aspects of social life, such as norms and values: “[t]his competence, moreover, is integral with attitudes, values, and motivations concerning language, its features and uses, and integral with competence for, and attitudes toward, the interrelation of language with the other codes of communicative conduct” (Hymes, 2001[1972]:60). However, from reading this quote, I get the distinct feeling that (verbal) language is placed in a special position, even though he says that CC should be integral with the other codes of communicative conduct. It is thus not clear whether or not e.g. body language is included as an aspect of CC. Still, this way of seeing language as an integrated part of social life is promising when thinking in terms of sociological relevance and especially relevance in terms of contributing to the understanding of face-to-face interaction.

Hymes writes further that “[i]t is likely that communities differ widely in the features in terms of which their ways of speaking are primarily organized” (Hymes, 2003[1967]:40); there is no general, universal competence but rather it is dependent on other factors\(^\text{15}\) in the society where the person is situated. This is indeed a very important point of his concept; even if he does not explicitly state the reasons why this differs, it becomes apparent that his view is not that there is just one universal CC, but rather different for every (speech) community. This is also pointed out by Collier (1988) who means that different groups have different (communicative) competencies and that competencies can be negotiated (Collier 1988:124f), which seems surprisingly parallel to ideas within interactionism that identities and the social self are negotiated within interaction\(^\text{16}\).

Language from Hymes’ perspective is an integrated part of the interaction, one of the codes of interaction. Still, he divides the codes of interaction into language and ‘other codes’. This means that language in itself has a major focus and the ‘other codes’ are not even specified. In my way of reading him it stands out that CC only concerns mastery of language in the interaction situation, not the ‘other codes’. Hymes states further that “there are several sectors of communicative competence, of which the grammatical is one” (Hymes 2001[1972]:62)\(^\text{17}\). This can be interpreted as Hymes seeing only the different parts of language competence as making up CC, not the other codes of the interaction. Support for this reading of Hymes can be found through looking at how others have used him, which has mainly been done by researchers within the field of Second Language Learning. One example of one who clearly sees CC as a linguistic, though communicative/interactive, competence, is Harlow (1990): “The term “communicative competence,” introduced by Hymes, implies that a speaker must possess several types of knowledge in order to understand and communicate successfully in a language” (Harlow 1990:328, my emphasis). Another example is given by Bell (1976): “communicative competence might be thought of as a kind of ‘mixer’ which

\(\text{14}\) Maybe with the exception of sign language. This is of course fundamentally different from body language.

\(\text{15}\) One can understand this as such factors as which language is spoken, social organization, culture etc.

\(\text{16}\) See e.g. Goffman (1959, 1967)

\(\text{17}\) This quotation is a part of the debate about which parts of language are the most important.
performed the function of balancing available linguistic forms chosen by drawing on the linguistic competence of the user, against available social functions housed in some kind of social competence” (Bell 1976:210-11, in Thomas 1983). Here can be seen the way of, referring to CC as combination of linguistic knowledge and knowledge of what is (socially) accepted. Thus there seems to be an underlying idea of communication as equalling verbal communication.

Collier (1996), as well as Hymes himself (see above), makes the division between communicative and cultural competence: “communication competence referred to conduct that is mutually appropriate and effective” and “Cultural competence referred to mutually appropriate and effective conduct for the particular cultural identity shared by the group or relational partners in the particular situation” (Collier 1996:317). This is again the, according to me, unnecessary split between two concepts that are essentially part of the same thing, i.e. the interaction. Savignon (1976) interprets CC as including knowledge of “non-verbal communication cues such as distance, posture, gestures, facial expressions” (Savignon 1976:4), however she does not seem to recognise the need for research into these kind of cues18.

Thus, according to me, Hymes’ concept has a serious flaw, apparent above, due to its too close connection with classical linguistics. Because of this, an alternative concept is needed for the study of interaction within sociology, in order to gain a better insight into face-to-face interaction. Focus of CC, especially as it has been interpreted, is too exclusively on verbal language. This leads to ignorance of the importance of other codes in interaction, such as e.g. body language and gaze. This is also what makes Hymes’ concept, although promising through its interactive view upon language and language use, not fully sociological adequate. Sociologists can not limit their study of interaction to verbal language and thus there is need for a broader concept, preferably one which can be used cross-disciplinary. The problem with CC is that it has connotation of focusing on verbal communication. The non-verbal aspects tend to be forgotten. Even though Hymes describes his view upon ‘communicative’ in a way which seems suitable for giving understanding of interaction as a whole: “The adjective, “communicative”, should be taken as comprehending competences in and for communication” (Hymes 1985:17), as the difference between interaction and communication is very subtle (language is not the only way to communicate), he still neglects the non-verbal parts of communication and this reduces the usefulness of his concept.

2.1.2 Developments of Hymes’ concept

Kasper (2006) defines what she means is “standardly referred to as “interactional competence19” (Kasper 2006:86) within the field of second language learning studies, as “the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible, socially organized interaction” (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984:1, in Kasper 2006:86). This feels like an inclusive, covering concept. Unfortunately, most of the scholars who use this concept choose to ignore other communicative cues than verbal language (see below). Marshall (2008) writes that:

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18 Which I mean are especially relevant for those interested in Second Language Learning and cross-cultural communication, as non-verbal communication is an important part of the interaction, especially for those who do not have sufficient knowledge of a language.

19 I have chosen only to look only at authors who use this terms related to Hymes’ concept, or to a similar tradition, thus when it is used eg. within the field of (dis)functional families (eg. Beavers & Hampson 2000), child development (eg. Danby & Farell 2004) or the social organisation of space and place (Crabtree 2000) I do not judge this to be relevant for this paper.

In order to orientate their activities by calling upon different normative elements that are more or less appropriate to the situation, individuals must first make sense of what the situation is, often on the basis of quite fragmentary, fleeting and incomplete evidence. This, in turn, is influenced by what Hochschild (1979) calls ‘framing rules’ and Cicourel (1973) refers to as ‘interactional competence’” (Marshall 2008:420f21).

Cicourel writes that “Interactional competence makes conversational exchanges and everyday decisions possible” (Cicourel, 1974:198, in Slembrouk 2004:9322). This is just to agree to, but too unspecified to be useful in determining what is included in this competence or not.

The term ‘interactional competence’ has been used further on by e.g. Kramsch (1986) and Young (2000). These writers are situated within the field of Second Language Learning and especially Young (2000) has made his concept in opposition to and as a development of CC. Those who draw upon their work include e.g. within Second/Foreign Language Learning, in general, e.g. Hall (1995, 1999), Cekaite (2007), Chalhoub-Deville (2003), with focus more in the direction of cross-cultural understanding, e.g. Davies (2004) or pragmatics, e.g. Ohta (1999).

Kramsch (1986) asks the question: “is proficiency synonymous with interactional competence?” (Kramsch 1986:367). She means that to be interactionally competent is more than some kind of mechanical proficiency and requires knowledge about the culture of the community as well as of social factors influencing what is the proper way to express oneself. She defines interactional competence as “the ability to organize one’s thoughts and one’s speech in human interactions” (Kramsch 1986:367). It is hard to see any other difference between this and CC except for the adding of thoughts and the fact that it is clearly specified by Kramsch (1986) that this concerns the organization of speech, thus about structure of the speech in the interaction. There is still the same, underlying idea about verbal language as the main mean of interacting. Further on she means that “the difficulties lie in the difference in expectations, assumptions, and general representations of the world between two speakers” (Kramsch 1986:368). This is similar to Hymes’, as it takes differences in ways of expressing oneself between groups for granted. Still Kramsch (1986) is more clear about what it is that is different. From this follows that one reason why different competencies are needed are because the interaction is different for different speakers. So it takes one step in the direction of saying that interactional competence depends upon who is participating and the context.

According to Young (2000), who takes another step in the same direction as Kramsch (1986) what is needed is a “constructivist, practice-oriented view of interaction and competence” (Young 2000:5). I completely agree to the importance of this; such a view is indeed needed. He adds that “The theory of interactional competence seeks to explain the variation in an individual speaker’s performance from one discursive practice to another” (Young 2000:4), thus interactional competence, in his version, is context-dependent. He means further that this is the difference between his concept and CC; he sees CC as something more static, as an ability which an individual has or has not. His theory of interactional competence is summarized in the following manner:

“First, it is concerned with language used in specific discursive practices rather than on language ability independent of context. Second, it is characterized by a focus on the co-construction of discursive practices by all participants involved rather than on a single person. Third, the theory describes a set of general interactional resources that participants draw upon in specific ways in order to co-construct a discursive practice” (Young 2000:5).

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23 Between speakers of different language and/or with different backgrounds.
This is clearly more specified and even more turned towards an idea of a socially created interactional competence than Hymes’ concept. Still it is evident that it is concerned only with verbal language in interaction. Young (2000) continues with describing what his interactional competence consists of:

“Participants, then, bring to a discursive practice at least these six resources: a knowledge of rhetorical scripts, a knowledge of register specific to the practice, a knowledge of patterns of turn-taking, a knowledge of topical organization, a knowledge of an appropriate participation framework, and a knowledge of the means for signalling boundaries between practices and transitions within the practice itself” (Young 2000:9).

This gives very good insights into what is needed to be analyzed in order to understand the structure of verbal interaction, as well as structure of interaction in general. This is very useful for other disciplines and especially for sociologists concerning themselves with conversation and discourse analysis. Still, as a sociologist, I keep asking myself why he restricts his concept to only concern language (even if it is language as discourse, i.e. as interaction). His perspective could easily be applied to the whole of the interaction; e.g. the patterns of turn-taking are not only a linguistic feature, more so it is a feature of the interaction (within that specific context, with those specific participants) as a whole.

Everything he takes up is relevant within the course of interaction, but his concept still does not cover a ‘full’ interactional competence. Of course, as he is a linguist, he does not claim to know about interaction as a whole, only by naming his competence as general interaction competence does he make a mistake. He should acknowledge that interaction is more than just verbal and thus his name is misleading, though maybe less so than Hymes’.

“Whereas communicative competence has been interpreted in much of the testing literature as a trait or bundle of traits that can be assessed in an individual, interactional competence is co-constructed by all participants in a discursive practice and is specific to that practice” (Young 2000:9).

Thus interactional competence according to Young (2000) is context- and participant-dependent. In one respect, he is correct that his concept is indeed different than CC, and seeming more useful than Hymes’, through focusing on the competence as also situated within a context. From Hymes’ it is easy to read CC as something a speaker either has or has not; after reading Young (2000) it is clear that this is a problem on Hymes’ part. Not being able to fully account for the changing nature of situation and from there the changing competence needed to participate in the interaction, is a hindrance when applying Hymes’ concept. Here Young (2000) provides us with a valuable development of Hymes. The idea of interactional competence as co-constructed implies that it is not only about a speaker in isolation but of speakers in interaction. However, he writes further that interactional competence is “distributed among all participants to the practice” (Young 2000:10). He thus means that the competence is not a property of the interactant but rather of the interaction in itself. In one way it is hard to look upon competence as something non-individual, but if looked upon in a way that means that the demands which the situation has, i.e. what kind of competence is needed, are created by all the participants together. Still, the knowledge and abilities the individual has are a part of creating the situation, thus there is an individual part of it; to say that nothing is within the individual is to go too far, but to Young (2000) has a point as to the communal, social nature of interaction. That, together with the pointing out of the context-dependency of interactional competence and the structure of discourses in interaction, is his main strong point.

24 This can be compared with Rawls view upon Interaction Order (see Section 2.2.2).
2.1.3 Summary of general strengths and weaknesses for above mentioned concepts

To summarize, the models we have looked at in this section have both strengths and weaknesses. The main weakness is that the concepts which should be used to describe the competence needed to communicate focus on verbal language as the primal (or only) mean of communication; this is too one-dimensional. Even the authors who call their concept ‘interactional competence’ still make the same ‘mistake’ as Hymes; i.e. limiting the competence to concern only the linguistic abilities, thus excluding eg. social and cultural knowledge and body language. This is especially clear when looking at Young (2000), whose model is, in fact, describing more than just verbal interaction, yet he chooses to limit his theory to that aspect. This makes the models, not only clearly sociologically inadequate, as there is a need for acknowledging the importance of other cues for communication, such as gaze and other types of body related means of communicating messages, but also denies the multi-faceted nature of interaction. Later attempts, after Hymes’, especially Young (2000), see the need to and have tried to broaden/change the concept. However, within these attempts the verbal language ability still becomes the only or the most important communicative cue. Another weakness is that the concepts are not clear enough; the attempts of finding a definition (the best made by Young 2000) still leave the concept as something diffuse and sketchy.

Strengths of the concept can be found in the view upon language as communicative, language as foremost use and not as knowledge. Having CC, according to Hymes, is about following the norms of language use in a specific speech community. CC is created within the community, within social conduct, i.e. within interaction. As it is expressed by Harlow (1990) “language is composed of not just linguistic and lexical elements; rather, language reflects also the social context, taking into account situational and social factors present in the act of communication” (Harlow 1990:348). Thus through analyzing language one can reveal information about interaction and social life in general.

From the later attempts, Young (2000) makes the most fruitful one. His main contribution to the understanding of interaction lies in that he sees interactional competence as context-dependent (depending on situation and participants) and acknowledges the communal and varying nature of interaction.

Concluding, it is not possible to study every part of the interaction. This requires more time and knowledge than any one person can have. The important thing, which I feel is missing within all the concepts above is the awareness of interaction as much more than something that belongs within one discipline; one can name all relevant factors but point out that ones abilities/speciality/knowledge are not enough to study everything; it is making a one-dimensional concept sound broad and general that is a mistake. What is needed, in order to describe the competence needed within interaction, is an additional concept, one which focuses upon other aspects of interaction than linguistic ones; a more sociological perspective upon interaction. Because of this, the second part of this section will focus upon interaction order, a sociological and interactionist concept.
2.2 Interaction Order

The first sociologist to use the concept of *Interaction Order* was Goffman and therefore I intend to give a short summary of his way of defining the concept before moving on to describing the concept as it is going to be used in this paper, namely as it is defined by Rawls. Then I will add some short points where I think my perspective on IC can contribute to the concept of Interaction Order and vice versa, thus showing why IC is a useful concept for sociologists and for understanding face-to-face interaction and why Interaction Order is a key sociological building-block within IC; adding a perspective which is clearly not covered within the framework of Hymes. I believe that this can be a very fruitful concept for understanding the non-verbal aspects of interaction.

2.2.1 Goffman on Interaction Order

Goffman (1983) writes that “My concern over the years has been to promote acceptance of this face-to-face domain as an analytically viable one - a domain which might be titled, for want of any happy name, the *interaction order* - a domain whose preferred method of study is microanalysis” (Goffman, 1983:2). From this the concept of Interaction Order can be seen as the sum of Goffman’s thoughts, a perspective which e.g. Rawls (1987, 2000) shares. The basis for this can be seen already earlier in the works of Goffman: “A state where everyone temporarily accepts everyone else’s lines is established. This kind of mutual acceptance seems to be a basic structural feature of interaction, especially the interaction of face-to-face talk” (Goffman, 1967:11). Thus there is an agreement between the participants as to the form of interaction. Here Goffman starts to outline the structural features of interaction. This leads to some questions. How can the above mentioned face-to-face domain be defined? What constitutes the Interaction Order? What properties does it have? In his Presidential Address of 1983, Goffman outlines this.

He seeks out to define rules for interaction as “the workings of the interaction order can easily be viewed as the consequences of systems of enabling conventions, in the sense of the ground rules for a game, the provisions of a traffic code or the rules of syntax of a language” (Goffman 1983:5). The interaction order is a kind of rule-based structure which regulates interaction situations. He sees this structure as a universal phenomenon, which becomes apparent in the following: “I have been speaking in terms that are intended to hold for face-to-face existence everywhere” (Goffman 1983:6). Further on he explains how the interaction order develops: “To be sure, the interaction order prevailing even in the most public places is not a creation of the apparatus of a state. Certainly most of this order comes into being and is sustained from below as it were, in some cases in spite of overarching authority not because of it” (1983:6. my emphasis). The Interaction Order is thus not something which is dependent upon social structure in the meaning of macro structure but rather something developed within and dependent upon the interaction in itself.

The interaction order is ordered and based upon similarities; it is a fruit of a shared background, a sort of shared interaction values: “Yet it appears to me that as an order of activity, the interaction one, more than any other perhaps, is in fact orderly, and that this orderliness is predicated on a large base of shared cognitive presuppositions, if not normative ones, and self-sustained restraints” (Goffman 1983:5). Goffman sees this interaction order, the

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25 If someone used this term before Goffman did and attached a similar meaning to it, this is not something I’m aware of and it is also nothing that Rawls (1987, 1989, 1992, 2000) has chosen to focus on.

26 For a deeper discussion about Goffman and *Interaction Order*, see Rawls (1987).
structure of the interaction, as something which does not need macro structures in order to receive its form. Rather there are interaction internal factors that determine the interaction order. Still it becomes, to a certain extent, influenced by interaction external factors:

“I need only remind you that the dependency of interactional activity on matters outside the interaction - a fact characteristically neglected by those of us who focus on face-to-face dealings - doesn't in itself imply dependency on social structures. As already suggested, a quite central issue in all face-to-face interaction is the cognitive relation of the participants, that is, what it is each can effectively assume the other knows. This relationship is relatively context-free, extending beyond any current social situation to all occasions when the two individuals meet” (Goffman 1983:12).

From above, this does not seem to be context dependent, dependent upon outside (interactant-external) factors but rather some kind of knowledge within the participants; shared knowledge which is manifested in the structure of the interaction. In Rawls (1987) analysis of Goffman’s Interaction Order one can find support for my reading above:

“Goffman presents a picture of constraints on interaction which are internal to interactional scenes. He paints a picture wherein social order and meaning require a particular interactional relationship between individual and group. Actions do not acquire their meaning primarily through a relation to external ends but rather through a commitment to the internal ends of the interaction order” (Rawls 1987:141); “meaning is not a product of contingent situational factors either, but, rather the product of a working consensus; a commitment to the interaction order” (Rawls 1987:142).

Thus the interaction order creates meaning within interaction through “commitment to interactional groundrules” (Rawls 1987:144). From Goffman’s perspective, a perspective different from Hymes’, the conduct within the social sphere of face-to-face interaction, and through this the creation of meaning, is clearly beyond using verbal language to communicate. He writes that “Social interaction can be identified narrowly as that which uniquely transpires in social situations, that is, environments in which two or more individuals are physically in one another’s response presence.” (Goffman, 1983:2). Thus interaction is about co-presence and not about verbal communication. This is also illustrated through the following:

“Emotion, mood, cognition, bodily orientation, and muscular effort are intrinsically involved, introducing an inevitable psychobiological element” (Goffman 1983:3). “It is not only that our appearance and manner provide evidence of our statuses and relationships. It is also that the line of our visual regard, the intensity of our involvement, and the shape of our initial actions, allow others to glean our immediate intent and purpose, and all this whether or not we are engaged in talk with them at the time” (Goffman 1983:4).

Thus, what becomes apparent is that Goffman is not only concerned with interaction as communication through verbal language; rather the opposite: he views other factors (our physical actions) as things that are as much communicative factors as verbal language. This shows that Interaction Order and the perspective of Goffman upon interaction concerns something else than Hymes and CC. The concept of Interaction Order can thus add a new angle when combined with the concepts of the linguists mentioned in this paper.

2.2.2 Rawls on Interaction Order

Rawls (2000) has developed Goffman’s concept of Interaction Order (further on IO) further, partly through ‘culturalizing’ it. With this I mean that she has added the perspective that different (cultural/ethnical/social) groups share their own interaction orders, which differs
from one another. In contrast to Goffman’s view, for Rawls there is no universal IO which can explain the interaction between any two people but interaction (and thus the order it creates) is rather something which is created within a group and is dependent upon different factors, such as the history of the group. She argues that two different IO’s can collide with each other and that “Whenever persons who cannot recognize one another’s Interaction Order practices interact, they will produce serious miscommunications” (Rawls, 2000:255). She means that in conversation there are certain expectations about how a normal conversation should be conducted, what can be done, which questions are to be asked etc., and that one can “refer to these expectations as preferred” (Rawls, 2000:248). There are preferences for a specific type of interaction structure within different groups and it is important to understand that IO is not some kind of universal order but rather that the different orders can lead to conflicts in meetings between different groups. Here one can see the biggest difference with respect to Goffman’s concept. “As contact between different groups and societies has increased, so have misunderstandings of talk and social practices and, with them, the interpretive narrative moments and the negative narratives, or stereotypes, that they generate” (Rawls, 2000:255). These misunderstandings and stereotypes arise because of the different IOs and are due to the fact that:

“[w]hen persons from the “other” group violate the Interaction Order expectations, narratives about the “other” are developed in order to explain why their behavior diverged from what was expected. These narratives, because they are generated in order to explain problems, tend to explain behavior in negative ways. They quickly develop into negative stereotypes” (Rawls, 2000:255).

In opposition to this situation, in which the different IOs lead to misunderstandings and stereotyping, stand situations “when practices are mutually recognizable, they do not require interpretation, and a narrative interpretation does not, and in fact cannot, occur.” (Rawls, 2000:255). In other words, different IOs which ‘collide’ does not only lead to problems in the on-going conversation but can also create and enhance gaps between different groups, something which can clearly be seen in the examples she gives in her article; examples from interaction situations between White and African Americans.

In her article she shows, with the help of a great number of examples, how the fact that white and African Americans have “conflicting Interaction Order practises” (Rawls, 2000:248), and as they are not aware of this, they judge members of the other group using criteria from the own order which leads to that these groups fail to communicate; ”a complete failure to communicate” (Rawls, 2000:273). “When Interaction Order preferences are not met, ordinary conversational “moves” cannot be recognised” (Rawls, 2000:254). This means that the conversation fails completely; one could say that conversation simply can not begin as the participants can not understand the Others’ manner of speaking (as in structure of speech), even though they speak the same language. Important is to understand that this is about how talk, in the meaning of interactions (talk primarily a social unit and not as a linguistic one), is structured; it’s not about structure on a ‘lower’ level (e.g. grammar). Rawls (2000) does very little in terms of explicit focusing on language in itself, even though she of course sees that interaction is partly conducted through language (using linguistic means); her focus is on what happens on a ‘macro’, structural level within the interaction and how this happens. Language, thus, becomes one medium (out of several) through which interaction is conducted. This is thus highly compatible with the view on IC expressed above, and this is one reason for including this concept as an important one for understanding IC.

It is also important to point out that Rawls (2000) sees judgement of the other interactants’ and ones own IO as something unconscious: ”In terms of his interactional

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27 See Rawls (1987, 2000) for further details about this.
practice, this man is not just being treated as if he were different, he is in fact acting differently. However, it is quite apparent that he has no idea that this is the case” (Rawls, 2000:269). In Rawls’ theory the different groups are unconsciously using their respectively IOs and not realizing this, they blame the Others’ otherness, which is expressed as being properties of the Others, which should be something dependent on their culture (culture in an essentialist sense as something unchanging, almost biological), making them simply ‘different’. Thus the fact that this is unconscious leads to simple stereotypes based on belief that they interact differently not because they simply have a different IO but because they are essentially different. This might seem as wordplay; if they are acting differently, does not this mean that they are different? Following Rawls (see quotation above), yes, there is in one sense a difference, but this is a property of the IO, not a property of the people themselves. Because of the different meanings ascribed to different behaviour within the different IOs, the being different can actually just be a case of something that ‘look different’ when looked upon from another perspective than the in-group’s.

Even though there might be differences in the actual language use between the two groups that Rawls has studied, the possibility of language as a reason for misunderstandings is not discussed within her article. Instead her focus is upon inequality: “Intelligibility, at the level of Interaction Order, will not tolerate a great deal of inequality” (Rawls, 2000:273) and “Interaction Order prerequisites for intelligibility place limits on the degree of inequality that the achievement of mutual intelligibility can tolerate” (Rawls, 2000:272). This inequality can be interpreted as pure difference, where it is about groups that simply have practises that seem distant from each other or as something hierarchal, status based. I mean that the latter reading is more useful as understanding that relationships between groups is an important factor in order to be able to understand which position their IOs respectively has in society. Still, the theory is not only useful for explaining this but also to see how difference in general can create hindrances, which may be hard or impossible to overcome, within interaction between members of different groups.

Also regarding language view Rawls has developed Goffman’s concept. She writes that “A systematic theory of the interaction order would require a theory of the social construction of meaning in talk such as that offered by Sacks and Schegloff” (Rawls 1987:141). She thus draws upon insights from conversation analysis as she means that they have a less structural view upon language than Goffman. Rawls (1989) writes that “Sacks, following the theoretical insights of Garfinkel, argues for a locally produced order at the level of talk and practical action” (Rawls 1989:153). She equals this locally produced order with Goffman’s and her concept of IO and she continues through showing why this is relevant for meaning within conversation, showing that IO is important for meaning production within interaction:

“Utterances are what Sacks calls sequence relevant and their sequence relevance is part of what provides for understanding. We share a set of sequence relevancies which cut across institutional settings to provide the basic understanding of talk. Conversation seems to be designed in such a way that any next thing one says can only be understood in the context of what went before” (Rawls 1989:160).

Thus, without understanding the IO, understanding what goes on within the frame of the interaction is hard; then the scenario described in Rawls (2000) is created. When the IO is not shared interaction is not possible. She continues “Conversational expectations are, according to Sacks, inherently interactional and organized with respect to the needs of conversation, not with respect to the needs of grammar, truth criteria, or institutional order” (Rawls 1989:161). This is a main point with IO; it is determined by interaction in itself and not by outside structures or structures of a lower level (i.e. grammar). A parallel to this can be seen when

28 See Rawls (1987) for more on the, according to her view, short-comings of Goffman’s view upon language.
Young (2000) writes about “a view of social realities as interactionally constructed rather than existing independently of interaction, of meanings as negotiated through interaction rather than fixed in advance of interaction” (Young 2000:1). In the following section this will be commented upon, as this is relevant for my notion of IC. Finally she summarizes her line of reasoning with: “I have identified the interaction order with certain constraints imposed by self and meaning and by the obligations and expectations which are generated thereby” (Rawls 1992:132).

2.2.3 Interaction Order within the frame of Interaction Competence: Critique and development

Generally IO fits very well within my frame of IC. I consider IO to be a basic concept for understanding what from a sociological perspective can go wrong in conversations; it can help the analysis of miscommunication as stemming from clashes of interaction order and thus not as depending upon one factor but rather incorporating culture, language use and body language into one unit; the interaction and its order. Because of this, IO is an important building block within IC; it takes into account the ‘macro-structures’ of the interaction; which is still something different than all the parts in isolation. It is apparent that knowledge of IO is a basic aspect of being interaction competent; it is necessary knowledge in order to be able to interact at all. There are, however, some points within Rawls’ concept of IO that one can criticize and some which I mean need to be developed in order to fit better into IC.

Rawls write that “The interaction order is present as an organizational feature in all situations” (Rawls 1988:127). However, it is not clear from her argument if IO is context-dependent, if it varies with situations or if it is more of something static. IC is seen, not as a static competence that one has or has not, but rather as varying within different contexts, and this requires a perspective of context-dependency also within IO. My perspective, which is neither confirmed nor rejected in the writings of Rawls (1987, 1988, 1989, 1992, 2000), is that as IO is something which is dependent upon the group, and thus not universal but varying, it is logical that it also varies with situation type. Therefore I choose to view IO as context-dependent and thus one can have IC with regard to the IO of certain situations but not within other situations.

In Rawls (2000) IO is put forward as something unconscious but from my perspective the unconscious part is not mainly what the others do in the interaction (the visible acting) and how they do this but rather the reasons behind the behaviour; why they do as they do and what it is they do through doing as they do. Bailey (2000) adds the possibility of interactants’ awareness of the differences in IO, or as he calls it ‘communicative patterns’, as consciously building a group identity around the differences: “individual social actors are not simply unwittingly reproducing culturally determined scripts, but are using language to assert the legitimacy and positive value of the social identities associated with particular communicative practices” (Bailey, 2000:88). Here differences become an important part of a shared group identity, as opposite from other groups’. I mean that this possibility of a conscious use of the IO’s is something very important to consider when discussion IO; we have to be aware of the fact that people may have at least a superficial awareness about the importance of language use and IO; at least people surely know how one is supposed to behave oneself in situations and that others do differently. Language and interaction structure are important tools to create identities for individuals as well as for groups. It is important to see that IO should not be interpreted in a way which implies that people are not able to use differences in IO’s to create

29 Macro should here be understood as the overall structure of interaction; in opposition to micro which would mean the details within interaction.
groups and keep them together and in order to express and reinforce existing conflicts. What is unconscious is the knowledge that others do differently because of different IOs (or different language use) and not necessarily because they feel or think or mean differently.

Even though she sees language as a medium for interaction, and the need to study language-in-interaction, Rawls focuses on the structural organization of the interaction, which she states is her purpose\textsuperscript{30}. Within the frame of this paper, though, knowledge of IO is seen as an important element within the concept of IC. Language, especially in terms of being mother tongue or foreign language and within the discussion around the influence of language command upon a person’s ability to master the IO as well, can be seen as a factor of difference or even inequality. Different social and ethnical varieties\textsuperscript{31} and their different status can influence the interaction situation in different directions and amongst other things create an unequal situation between the interactants. This is something to be aware of and an aspect where tools from linguistics\textsuperscript{32} can be useful in order to see the influence of language command for the IC of the interactants. Language knowledge is a factor which influences a person’s knowledge of IO as lacking knowledge of a language can lead to that it is harder to notice or act according to the IO; in order to be aware of how interaction is conducted within a group, one needs at least rudimentary knowledge of that groups language or variety of a language. This is also connected to meaning. If one does not understand the words a part of the messages within the interaction are lost and through this it can be hard to see the meaning and purpose of a conversation. Knowledge of IO is tied tightly together with linguistic knowledge, thus these factors are intertwined and understanding IO needs also add a deep understanding of the place and influence of verbal language. This is also why I do not see IO as a concept which is ‘full’ and can explain every kind of miscommunication and interaction failure; knowledge of and ability for use of language, i.e. CC and the addition of the discourse structuring features of Young (2000) is a necessary element in order to understand the competence needed in interaction. Within the framework of IC, IO becomes an aspect which partly consists of the links between the different factors; the structure of the interaction as a whole, where other factors as well are important in their own right and not just as a part of IO. Language use in a situation is partly determined by the accepted IO, but to think that this is a one-way connection is to simplify; certainly the micro structure language can also influence the macro structure of interaction just as interaction on the micro level influences social structure on the macro level and vice versa.

IO is created from and through many factors which are cultural, social, contextual and linguistic and understanding these different factors and the relation in between them adds nuances to the complex picture which is the interaction. IC is about competence needed about all of these features, including knowledge of how to use the correct IO and about switching IO’s between situations etcetera. IO in isolation, just as is the case with the theory of Hymes, can not explain everything. In one way IO contains all the other factors, but still it is about structure as a whole; just studying IO does not give deep enough knowledge of the part. Focusing on overall structure might lead to a situation where one only sees the whole and therefore misses the part; just as focusing solely on the macro structures within society can not explain all factors influencing everyday life; one needs both micro and macro in order to understand human social behaviour and society.

\textsuperscript{30} Thus she can not be criticized for not doing this; my view is that one should not be studied without the other.
\textsuperscript{31} E.g. different dialects, sociolects and ethnically coloured varieties.
\textsuperscript{32} Such as the discourse structural features of Young (2000).
3. Two factors affecting Interaction Competence

This chapter will look into external factors that can affect the competence needed in order to be able to interact. Above the concept of IC has been outlined (See chapter 1) and the two main building-blocks of the concept have been described (See chapter 2). IC, from the outline above, can be seen as a competence within an interactant. However, no-one can be an interactant without others to interact with; without at least two interactants the situation can not be described as social interaction. Interaction Competence is performed within actual interaction and is thus something highly dynamic and constantly transforming and developing through interaction. Now it is time to have a look at factors outside of the interactant, to move towards looking at the notion of sufficient IC. Within this chapter I have chosen to focus upon context-dependency and acceptability, two possible affecting factors. I mean that these are the most important for determining what sufficient and necessary IC is and thus determining the competence needed, not just within the interactant but within the interaction situation. As can be throughout the two sections of this chapter, these two affecting factors are highly interrelated and affect each other as well.

3.1 Context-dependency & Interaction Competence

This section will discuss the relations between the context and Interaction Competence. I will outline what I mean with context-dependency and how this affects the Interaction Competence.

Central to an interactionist perspective upon society and human relations is the notion of context-dependency and thus the idea that social relationships and interaction vary with respect to features of the context and the interactants’ definitions of the context, i.e. of the situation. The context can be divided into local, immediate (inner) context of the interaction situation and non-local, overall (outer) context of the society as a whole. I mean that both inner and outer contexts are important for a perspective to be truly interactionist. Many interactionists have a tendency to focus only on the local context, thus arguing that interaction is not dependent upon macro-structural features of society. Schegloff (2006[1991]), writes that “‘Context’ can be as much a part of what traditionally has been meant by ‘social structure’ as attributes of participants are” (Schegloff 2006[1991]:92). Thus, from this perspective context can be seen as something very important or determining of the structure of the interaction; however, what is most likely meant by context when used by Schegloff is the local context. I want to add to this notion of context the idea that what can also be called ‘social structure’ in fact creates a macro-context in which an interaction is situated. Thus ‘context’ in my usage, should be understood as two-fold. Just as verbal and non-verbal communication complements each other and the one alone can not give a complete understanding of interaction, so does inner and outer context.

An example of context-dependency can be found in the reasoning of Reich & Schirmer (2008). In their article “A theory of Respect” (2008) Reich & Schirmer write:

“All communicative interaction requires that participants treat each other as agents or subjects, as opposed to mere objects. However, the extent to which – and the precise domains in which – they do so may vary. More precisely put, interactants ascribe each

33 See Thomas & Thomas (1928) for more on the definition of the situation.
34 As context for Conversation Analysists is mainly thought of as the local, immediate context of the conversation. See Norrby (2004:41ff) for more about the concept of context within Conversation Analysis (CA).
other highly context-specific sets of agentive abilities and rights” (Reich & Schirmer 2008:12).

This is the basis for their concept of respect; this notion of the right to respect as something varying with what they name the three parameters; the situation, the social roles (personas) of the interactants and their relations to each other, i.e. varying with respect to aspects within the context. This could be seen as a typical interactionist perspective. Whereas both Hymes and Rawls, within their specific concepts, talk very little about the effect of the context upon CC and IO respectively, I mean that the context is central for my concept of IC, as well as for e.g. Young (2000)s perspective. The question is in which way the context affects the IC of a person.

IC is about the abilities needed within interaction. The IC of a person can on the one hand be seen as a property of that person; that person has a certain level of competence within the four different areas of competence. However, how this level of competence is valued, if the IC of a person is at the moment, within the current situation, the type that is needed, this depends on situational factors; i.e. upon the context. Although the parameters set up by Reich & Schirmer (2008) are thought to define how claims upon respect vary within different situations, I mean that these can be used for defining how the appropriate IC varies as well. The idea with the concept of IC is not only to try to define which factors, or areas of competence, IC consists of, but also to see what will affect what is seen as sufficient IC to participate in interaction. The IC needed is not the same within every context. The competence needed within the different areas of competence (shortly concerning language, body, socio-cultural knowledge and IO) for a given context is different from what is needed for another context. To take a simple example: A business meeting with a big company requires a different IC from the interactants than an informal conversation with family. The settings are completely different, so are the participants and their relationships and from this follows that the required IC is different. All this can be understood without difficulties by competent interactants; everything from the correct choice of linguistic register to facial expressions or how the specific type of interaction is organised.

Because the context determines which IC is the appropriate one, it is important for interactants to be able to understand the current social context. Gumperz (2006[1977]) writes about what he calls contextualization cues, which can be summarized as those things that make us realize what type of context it is; a kind of markers of context. These can be everything from body language to little linguistic cues. Somehow we need to specify the context in order to be able to ‘chose’ the right behaviour and this is done (by all participants) through using ‘contextualization cues’. We have expectations about what certain cues look like as well about how these cues are to be interpreted. If one can not read the context correctly, one also can not produce the expected behaviour. Of course one can imagine a situation where an interactant can indeed read the ‘signals’ indicating the form of the context but is still unable to act accordingly. For example, an interactant can understand that s/he is supposed to address another interactant by a polite form, but still be unable to produce that form because of lack of knowledge of the form or inability to produce it within interaction. Similarly, it can be possible for one interactant to be able to produce the accepted behaviour but if s/he does not understand the cues, how is s/he then supposed to know what to do?

Contextualization cues, in the meaning of Gumperz, deal most directly with the immediate context, as they e.g. can signal relationships between participants (status within the inner context etc) but are also linked to factors of the outer context. They can be used to bring elements from the context outside into the interaction situation, e.g. knowledge of status can

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35 Something which will not be done within the frame of this paper; here only an outline will be made as defining, in the sense of making a complete definition, is something too complex for such a limited paper such as this one.
be realised as contextualization cue making clear about the status relationship between the interactants.

Further on Gumperz writes that “contextualization expectations are highly culturally specific” (Gumperz 2006[1977]:81). He gives the example of a driver of West-Indian origin, driving a London bus, who when saying ‘Exact change, please’ used an intonation which the British passengers interpreted as threatening. The driver was in fact only using the normal way of indicating emphasis within his mother-tongue and did not mean to be rude or threatening. Thus, as can be seen from the example above, adding the factors of cross-cultural interaction will therefore make the picture more complex. Following Thomas (1983) I use the term cross-cultural “as a shorthand way of describing not just native-non-native interactions, but any communication between two people who, in any particular domain, do not share a common linguistic or cultural background” (Thomas 1983:91). This is a covering definition, compatible with my concept of IC, which is not a group competence but an individual one. Focusing on macro descriptions of culture creates the risk of missing actual explanations of misunderstandings in terms of differences based on the interaction level, i.e. within the ‘interaction culture’, which can differ between two people within the same ‘macro-culture’. A context-dependent definition of cross-cultural interaction takes into account that the specific situation in part determines what constitutes the relevant factors for the interaction; it is a dynamic definition. One could say that, in my terminology, cross-cultural means not sharing the same expectations about what is the sufficient IC for a given situation, which in Gumperz terminology would mean not understanding the meaning of the contextualization cues or not being able to act accordingly. That is, understanding these cues, which can be cues within any of my four areas of competence, i.e. regard any part of the interaction, requires IC. Thus IC is about being able to ‘read the context’; the context determines the required behaviour, i.e. determines which IC is needed in that particular situation. I chose to see this aspect as something inherent to the whole of IC, thus it is included within all the four areas of competence. This ability is linked to these areas; it is not an aspect of IC that can be separated from the others, rather it is included in having competence in the different areas.

Another way of viewing the context is in terms of frames. Tannen & Wallat (2006[1987]) mean that the common determination in the literature about frames and related concepts is “the notion of structures of expectation” (Tannen & Wallat 2006[1987]:333), something which is clearly on another level than Gumperz notion of contextualization cues. Whereas his cues can be seen as something shown more on the micro level as details giving hints about what type of situation it is, “frames” in Tannen & Wallat (2006[1987])s meaning is clearly on a higher, interaction structural level. They write about ‘interactive frames of interpretation’” (Tannen & Wallat 2006[1987]:333) where “the interactive notion of frame refers to a definition of what is going on in interaction, without which no utterance (or movement or gesture) could be interpreted” (Tannen & Wallat 2006[1987]:334). This is similar to the notion of IO described above (see section 3.2), even if IO refers to a yet higher level, the level of the interaction as a whole. They write further that:

“in order to comprehend an utterance, a listener (and a speaker) must know within which frame it is intended: for example, is this joking? Is it fighting? Something intended as a joke but interpreted as an insult (it could of course be both) can trigger a fight” (Tannen & Wallat 2006[1987]:334).

Frames are thus not only about situation type but also something which can be described as the ‘mood’ of the interaction. In one way, frames can be seen as a type of context-dependent mini-IOs, determining how utterances (or actions) within a specific interaction are supposed to be interpreted. This is a sort of context within interaction situations, i.e. about positioning the utterance/action within what can be call the ‘mood’; i.e. what type of
utterance/act it is and how it can be understood/interpreted within the bigger context. Of course, context-awareness includes being aware of this too; thus what one can call ‘frame-awareness’ can be seen as an aspect of IC.

Further on, Tannen & Wallat (2006[1987]) “use the term ‘knowledge schemas’ to refer to participants’ expectations about people, objects, events and settings in the world, as distinguished from alignments being negotiated in a particular interaction” (Tannen & Wallat 2006:334); this can be understood as the ability of “filling in unstated information which is known from prior experience of the world” (Tannen & Wallat 2006:334) and thus understanding the meaning of utterances/actions. When connecting this with Gumperz’ contextualization cues, one can interpret this ability as (among other things) the ability to recognize and interpret contextualization cues. This can also be seen as connected to socio-cultural knowledge.

The context is a factor affecting what can be labelled the ‘necessary IC’; to be able to read the context, as in both the inner, micro and outer, macro contexts, is an important aspect of having sufficient IC for a specific situation or rather interaction type. Even though two contexts are never identical, interaction situations can be grouped into types of interaction. For example, an interaction with the shop’s assistant at a supermarket follows a schema/structure of the expected turns in the interaction; e.g. the shop’s assistant say hi, the customer answers and puts the articles before the shop’s assistant who scans them and tells the total cost, the customer pays, takes the purchases and good-byes are exchanged. This also includes a certain type of relation between the customer and the shop’s assistant (where the customer, irrelevantly of his/her status outside of the shop, has a slightly higher status just through the fact that s/he is a customer) and can therefore be seen as a distinct interaction type.

Similarly, a visit at a doctor has another structure, the turns expected are different ones, and a different status relationship (where the doctor is the medical expert and can therefore judge for the patient when it concerns medical issues) and can therefore be seen as another situation type. Each situation type may have different schemas or different relationships and thus what is demanded from the respectively interactants is different depending on the context and their roles within the situation. Tannen & Wallat (2006) give an example from a medical examination of a child where the child’s mother is also present and how the doctor, within the frame of the medical examination, has to balance the different relations she has with the child and the mother respectively and thus uses different styles of speech when addressing the mother and the child; this is also an example of how context and the participant’s status change the interactants’ behaviour.

Within any particular context different aspects are relevant, and different parts of IC are more heavily weighted. Divergence from the standard pronunciation, for example, as long it does not render understanding impossible, can in one situation be of little importance for the outcome of that situation while the use of a polite form can be of extreme significance. In another situation the opposite may be the case. One could of course speculate that there might be a general pattern, where some things tend to be more important within most types of situations. However, this is not the topic of this paper and therefore has to be left out. It is enough to point out that this kind of pattern might exist but that the important things for

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36 This schema/structure can of course vary between cultures etc.
37 For example one could view features which may affect the meaning/message a lot therein that they change the social relationship between the interactants or imposes specific social roles upon them as generally more important for the outcome of the interaction. An example of these kind of features would for example be the use of titles or polite forms. From this would follow that it is more necessary to have sufficient IC when it concerns those factors. Similarly, one could argue that other features of the interaction would be of less importance. Such features would include e.g. minor aspects of grammar (such as genders). However, one could also imagine a situation were these ‘minor aspects’ could be very important.
this paper is this notion of sufficient IC as varying with respect to the context of the interaction.

I mean that context-dependent, sufficient IC is closely interrelated with using the accepted way of interacting. The things that are crucial to perform in order for ones IC to be accepted as ‘normal’, so that one can interact without difficulties, differ with linguistic, social and cultural context. In the next section, this notion of ICs as accepted is going to be discussed.

3.2 Acceptability & Interaction Competence

In the preceding section the relationship between the (local and outer) context and necessary/sufficient Interaction Competence was discussed. As IC is an interactional phenomenon, built upon the idea that sufficient IC is not something static, it was concluded that contextual features are important in determining the sufficient or ‘appropriate’ IC in one specific situation. This section discusses the notion of acceptability in relation to Interaction Competence. As what is important varies with context, one can also think that things vary with respect to acceptability. The possibility of mistakes made within the different areas of competence being ‘accepted’ by the other interactants varies. This is of course also tied to the context. In certain types of situations mistakes may not be accepted. With this means that the actions performed are not accepted as competent action, i.e. as actions coming from an interactant with sufficient IC. The question is therefore not only “what constitutes the sufficient IC within a specific situation”\(^38\), but equally important is the question about acceptability. Can one interactant’s IC be accepted as being sufficient? What is then this acceptability and how is it expressed? Within this section I will offer some different views upon the acceptability and suggest how they can be linked to Interactional Competence.

It is important to note that my meaning of acceptance/acceptability includes acceptance of the actions/acts\(^39\) of interactants and not of the perpetrators of the acts themselves. It is about accepting the actions and through that accepting the person’s IC as sufficient within the current situation. Therefore, the acceptance is not static; it is possible for one interactant to have sufficient IC in one situation but not in another; this varies with context and of course with the abilities of the interactant. It is not the case that one interactant always have acceptable IC and another interactant never has it. Still, non-acceptance of some interactants’ ICs, especially if it is repeatedly and if they belong to a different group than ‘the acceptors’ may lead to stereotypes about the first group as ‘they do not even know how to behave properly’. An example of this comes from Rawls (2000) where the two groups in her study\(^40\) created many stereotypes about the others as having bad traits, based in the fact that their patterns of interaction (i.e. IOs) were different. Another clear example of when a different IC is not accepted as being sufficient is given by Bailey (2000) who has studied service encounters between Korean immigrants and African Americans in the U.S. One of the two different perspectives he offers in order to explain the conflicts between the two groups is strikingly similar to Rawls\(^41\), that: “contrasting communicative patterns represent a source of frictions” (Bailey, 2000:87). He develops further how these different patterns of communication has social consequences: “Because it is so difficult to recognize details of

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\(^38\) This is mainly an empirical question and need not concern us here. The purpose of this paper is only to sketch an outline of the different areas of competence, introduce the idea of ‘sufficient and acceptable IC’ and discuss theoretically about its variable nature.

\(^39\) See Reich & Schirmer (2008) for the distinction between actions and acts.

\(^40\) White and African Americans.

\(^41\) See section 2.2.2
one’s own interactional expectations and practises - and to perceive of them as culturally specific rather than universal and natural - it is easier to account for another’s divergent behavior in intercultural situations through reference to negative intentions or traits” (Bailey, 2000:100); i.e. the outcome of the judgement of the actions becomes negative stereotypes of the ‘Others’. To be unaware of the differences in communicative patterns can have severe consequences: “Behavior that is (mis)perceived as impolite or disrespectful is particularly damaging to intergroup relations because it is frequently interpreted as actively threatening” (Bailey, 2000:101). Acceptance is performance-based, based on actions and not upon static properties of the interactants. However, this can clearly lead to more severe consequences, such as stereotypes and damaged relations between the groups, which is something to kept in mind.

Rawls (1989) writes that “Mills and Wittgenstein raised the study of language to a new level of importance by acknowledging the paradox of rules, i.e., that the application of a rule always involves interpretation or discretion as to whether this particular instance is a case for that rule” (Rawls 1989:157f). I see this as the core of what acceptability is within the frame of interaction (and especially as linked to my concept of IC); it is about whether or not an interactant’s IC can be accepted as being a case of the rule, i.e. being a case of sufficient IC within that particular situation. The concept of sufficient IC involves the notion of judgement of what can constitute this sufficient IC. This judgement is performed within an interaction and acceptable IC is therefore a something very dynamic, depending on the context.

Reich & Schirmer (2008) “Theory of Respect” includes something I find similar to my notion of acceptability; within their frame this is expressed as legitimacy. Legitimate claims upon respectful treatment are those claims that can be accepted by the participants as legitimate. They identify three parameters which define ‘legitimacy’ for the claims upon respectful treatment that an individual can put forward; namely “(1) respectee’s social persona (social identity plus personal identity), (2) definition of the situation, (3) definition of the relationship between respecter and respectee”; thus what is legitimate vary depending on the local context, including the status of the interactants in relationship to each other. Thus there are no truly static claims upon respectful treatment; (dis)respect is something dynamically created within the interaction. I see a parallel between this perspective and the one brought forward by my concept of IC, as both emphasises the importance of the context. Their concept takes into account both situational features (what type of situation is it) and questions of status and relationships between the interactants. One can say that sufficient IC is legitimate IC, as legitimate is defined by Reich & Schirmers (2008). Legitimate IC means the IC that is seen as legitimate by the participants (with regard to the three parameters above), i.e. legitimate IC is acceptable IC which is IC that can be accepted as sufficient by the other interactants.

Robin Lakoff and Teun A. van Dijk are two linguists who have written about the notion of acceptability. Even though they are firmly situated within the discipline of linguistics; they are clearly not researchers within social sciences, and thus concerned with language and not with the whole framework of interaction, their concern is what Eagleson (1977) calls “the sociolinguistical aspects of acceptability” (Eagleson 1977:65). They do not focus on syntax and grammar; rather they see acceptability as a force sometimes opposed to grammatical correctness and as something which is created within a context. Thus, I mean that, even though their focus is exclusively upon language it is upon language in a pragmatic (usage-based) sense and thus their thoughts can add to the sociological understanding of interaction. Lakoff (1977) writes:
The notion of acceptability, I have said above, implies a standard against which a speech act\textsuperscript{42} may be judged. It has also been pointed out that, in talking about acceptability as opposed to grammaticality, that standard is grounded in social and psychological context: an act of speech or behavior is judged acceptable in a specific context\textquoteright (Lakoff 1977:82).

Even if her terminology is clearly that of a linguist, she reaches the core of acceptability as I intend it within my concept of IC. ICs are judged, just as speech acts (or utterances) within the frame of Lakoff (1977), within the social (and psychological context). Similarly, van Dijk (1977) writes that “an utterance is acceptable in a conversation only if it is a speech act which is also appropriate relative to other (speech) acts of the conversation or interaction” (van Dijk 1977:49). As their focus is upon utterances, their perspective upon acceptability is a micro one. They mean the acceptance is found upon this level of every utterance (or broadening their notion somewhat to include non-linguistic interaction cues, upon every interactional action), whereas my view combines a micro and a macro perspective, where each part of IC, each feature included in any of the areas of competence, is important for the total sum which is IC. Thus every feature has its meaning, but also the combined features, the unity of IC, is of importance. Features of the local context as well as features from outside of the situation (what I call outer context) determine what can be seen as sufficient IC and thus ‘sets the standard’ against which any IC in that specific situation is judged.

Van Dijk (1977) writes further that:

“the one who accepts, the ‘acceptor’, not only has the freedom to decide whether to accept or not but also has the recognized ability or right to judge whether the desired properties are satisfied” (van Dijk 1977:41). “He may accept the utterance simply ‘as a (good, normal) utterance of his language’” (van Dijk 1977:42).

In the example above van Dijk writes about the ‘acceptor’ as if this could be any of the interactants; it is not specified which properties this ‘acceptor’ has except for that it seems that he is a native speaker of the language used within the interaction. However, not every interactant in a specific interaction is in the position to be the ‘acceptor’. I mean that there is an added factors of status or “who has the right to define what is acceptable?” in the within any interaction situation. For example, the native speaker of the language of interaction in opposition to the non-native, as well as that one with a higher level of education or higher economical position, may have a position of higher authority and thus be able to ‘dictate’ what is an acceptable IC. Thus, not all interactants are the same, and the acceptance of every interactant does not have the same value. For example in the situation described in Rawls (2000)\textsuperscript{43} with the different IOs of White and African Americans the White Americans have a higher position in society in general. Because of their position, their IO is seen as the norm of the society and the Others’ as deviating from the norm. Because of this difference in position, the White Americans have higher possibilities to judge what is acceptable. Thus status, both within the inner and the outer context,\textsuperscript{44} is a factor one has to take into account. Hugh Mehan (2006[1986]) writes that “not all definitions of situations have equal authority” (Mehan 2006[1986]:533). As he means that different definition of the situation have different ‘value’

\textsuperscript{42} For an introduction to speech act theory see Sadock (2004). For a classical paper from the founder of the theory see Austin (2006 [1962]). See also Levinson (1980).

\textsuperscript{43} See also Section 2.2.2

\textsuperscript{44} For example, one person may not have such a high position within society in general but be a very able interactant within the current, local, interaction context and thus have influence within that context. One should keep in mind that positions and status are relative things; they vary as well with regard to contextual features.
or authority, he has constructed a modified version of Thomas’ theorem\textsuperscript{45}, one which takes into account the factor of status:

\begin{quote}
“All people define situations as real; but when powerful people define situations as real, then they are real \textit{for everybody involved} in their consequences” (Mehan 2006[1986]:533)
\end{quote}

The definition of the situation is individual in the sense that every interactant has his/her own picture of the situation. Still, I mean that Mehan is right in pointing out the almost obvious fact that even if interaction is formed ‘here and now’ within the current situation it can not be seen as independent of macro-social features such as status. What he calls ‘powerful people’ I would call people with influence over the interaction situation through having a highly valued (in society as well as within the current society) IC; they may be people seen as ‘uncommonly interaction competent’ through their position within society and thus have ‘power’\textsuperscript{46}

Another way of viewing the aspect of status and how it affects the acceptance of the interactant’s IC is in terms of \textit{interaction capital}. Bourdieu (2006) writes about linguistic habitus\textsuperscript{47} and introduces the idea of linguistic capital as one of the forms of capital an individual has through stating that that “linguistic signs are also goods” (Bourdieu 2006:483). Thus there is the idea of linguistic resources, i.e. linguistic capital. Applying Bourdieu’s framework onto the concept of IC means broadening this notion of linguistic capital to include not only language but other factors within the interaction; one can thus speak of interaction capital. Acceptance is then the act where ones interaction capital becomes recognised as sufficient for use within the current interaction context. Having sufficient IC can, in Bourdieu’s terminology, be seen as having the \textit{necessary interaction capital}. The capital one brings to a situation is formed by macro-social factors but this is modified, through acceptance and through the local context. Thus ones interaction capital varies with context and is not a static property of the interactant. Of course, one brings interaction capital into the interaction, just as one has certain abilities within one’s IC but how this is valued is not only linked to macro-social factors, but also to the interactional context. Some factors may be influential within a higher number of different interactional contexts, some types of ICs may have a higher acceptability thus they are more easily accepted within many situation. For example, if a person is relatively educated this person brings this background into every situation and this may put the person in a position where s/he can determine what the acceptable IC within many situations is. However, educational level may not be relevant for the person’s status within all types of interaction. The one with the highest valued capital, within the current interactional context, has greater possibilities to influence the situation. Bourdieu expresses this as “the capacity to modify is greater the more capital one has” (Bourdieu 2006: 483). Being able to influence or modify the notion of what is acceptable or sufficient IC can thus be seen as an aspect of having an influential interaction capital and can be used to modify the outcome of a situation to one’s advantage. This is similar to the thought expressed above by Mehan (2006[1986]) and can also be seen in the following quote from van Dijk (1977):

\begin{quote}
“In an ‘accepting’ situation, however, there exists a serious possibility that the thing \textit{offered} may be refused or rejected, as we saw above. In such situations we decide whether to accept or to refuse, and hence we have \textit{reasons or grounds} for such acts. These reasons are based on our evaluation of the offered object with respect to the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{45} “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas & Thomas 1928:572).

\textsuperscript{46} The question of what power is, is a very complex issue and as this paper does not focus upon power-relations in particular, this question has to be left out. See Foucault (1990[1978]) for one perspective upon power.

\textsuperscript{47} For more about Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and capital see e.g. Bourdieu (1994).
Van Dijk includes this important factor of modifying situation to ones advantage in his notion of acceptability; ‘a desired state of affairs’. This is indeed relevant for the notion of acceptability of ICs as well. The idea is that an interactant may reject another’s IC with purpose of e.g. preserving ones ‘face’ or with some purpose of personal gain, which can include e.g. occupying a position of superiority. For example, in the case where someone corrects another’s behaviour (thus showing that the IC offered is not correct/sufficient), this can be done with the purpose of gaining a superior position within the interaction or within society as a whole. Unfortunately, it is not possible within the frame of this essay to develop this theme further, but it is something which deserves further attention in the future. Van Dijk writes further that “the sole external evidence that a mental act of acceptance is carried out in a course of conversation is the absence of explicit rejection” (van Dijk 1977:43); thus whenever not rejected, it is accepted. However, the rejection does not have to be explicit in the sense of making a clear, verbal comment upon it but must be possible to notice for the interactants to, even if not understood as a clear rejection of the IC. The process of accepting may be a psychological process but gives social consequences in the case of non-acceptance. These consequences are highly interesting and relevant for sociologists and make up one reason why acceptability is such a relevant in its influence upon what constituted sufficient IC within a given situation.

As interaction consists of many aspects or features there is the possibility that some of these features would be accepted and others not. It seems likely that some aspects within the interaction are more sensitive for acceptance; i.e. it is more crucial that those features are accepted as correct. Thomas (1983) writes: “While, however, a speaker who is not operating according to the standard grammatical code is at worse condemned as ‘speaking badly’, the person who operates according to differently formulated pragmatic principles may well be censured as behaving badly; as being an untruthful, deceitful, or insincere person” (Thomas 1983:107). I would say that being regarded as someone behaving badly is not the same as being seen as a bad person; however as can be seen above with the examples from Rawls (2000) and Bailey (2000), this can lead to negative stereotypes, which gets severe social consequences for the relations between the groups. A similar idea is brought forward by Kramsch (1986) writes that “it is by no means proven that linguistic errors cause more irritation than sociolinguistic or paralinguistic errors, which are in fact likely to lead to breakdown in communication or cause serious offence or insult without people even being aware of these often subtle aspects of communication” (Kramsch 1986:369). Also Lakoff (1977) writes “Although a sentence is judged by its appropriateness in its social, psychological and linguistic contexts, we may assume that some of these contexts outrank others in determining whether a sentence is acceptable” (Lakoff 1977:76). Lakoff (1977) is mostly concerned with sentences and not utterances or interactions. Still a parallel to IC can be seen here. The possibility is that some things are of greater importance with respect to their acceptability within many contexts; in order to be interaction competent these things may be more heavily weighted. One can speculate that features which are of a greater importance for preserving the social self48 and through that social order as well as features which are crucial

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48 Rawls writes “I have argued that the constraints pull in the direction of preserving self and meaning precisely because of the fragile nature of those elements; as a consequence, both self-interested action and blind following of institutional rules are countered and constrained by the interaction order” (Rawls 1992:131). See e.g. Goffman (1959, 1967) for more on ‘face’ and the preservation of self.
for serving the specific communicative purpose of the interaction situation would be more necessary in order to have ones IC judged as acceptable.

Sufficient IC can thus from the reasoning above be seen as accepted IC, not an objective sufficient IC for every situation type, which could be found and specified, but yet another factor of contextual relativity has been introduced; what is sufficient is that what is accepted as such.

4. Interaction Competence

The purpose of this section is to make a brief sketch of what a concept of the competence needed in interaction could look like, discuss why the two building-blocks above are, from my point of view, the most relevant for the sociological study of interaction and what this can add to the understanding of the interaction situation. The affecting factors from section 3 will also be woven into the concept.

Above it becomes apparent that Hymes’ concept Communicative Competence, as well as the developments of his concept (such as those made by Young 2000), has a major flaw because of their tendency to equal interaction/communication with using verbal language. Something similar, yet different is done by Rawls through her focus upon interaction structure, as she almost completely neglects the role of language within interaction. What this expresses is a way of looking at interaction that is fairly one-dimensional (though maybe Rawls less than Hymes). Focusing on just one factor (whichever this may be) when studying interaction does not give a full picture of the interaction situation. This critique should therefore not be viewed as only being directed towards the linguists and Hymes in particular, but rather towards any researcher whose theory or perspective focuses too exclusively on the ‘one explaining factor’ without acknowledging the importance of a broad perspective. Some factors within interaction may well be more important than others but awareness of the multi-dimensionality inherent to the interaction situation is something which should be including in any theory of interaction, irrelevantly of the discipline where the theory has its ‘home’. With this should not be understood that a single researcher has to study all factors; no, this is of course impossible. What is important is to have a broad theoretical frame where the phenomenon is viewed from different perspectives and to (if possible) cooperate with researchers from other disciplines.

What the earlier attempts (e.g. Hymes, Young 2000, Kramsch 1986) have actually tried, even though they claim to speak of interaction as a whole, is to define linguistic interaction competence, which is not true (or complete) interaction competence. From a sociological perspective this type of one-dimensional way of seeing interaction may be, even though Hymes has a sociolinguistic perspective upon language, a result of lack of enough understanding of the social dimension of interaction (the preservation of self through interaction, the idea of Face, body language). Without realizing that talk is but a small part of what happens within interaction and that verbal language is only one of the means of communication, interaction can not be truly understood. The same is of course true for the opposite case. Also the perspective of Goffman and Rawls, through their focus upon interaction structure but not upon linguistic structure, even though their concept is an

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49 though more developed than the outline proposed within chapter 1
50 I do not argue that language is not an important factor within the interaction situation, but I turn against the one-dimensional way of studying interaction only from the perspective of language.
51 See Goffman (1967).
important building block, especially for the sociological understanding of interaction, does not lead even close to a complete understanding of the phenomenon of social interaction. In order to understand interaction one first has to realize that the nature of interaction is inherently multi-dimensional and that there is a need to look at different factors as well as the inter-dependency between them. From this follows that this competence is something which is inter-disciplinary; as the different academic disciplines have their different perspectives and focuses, the deepest understanding of the multi-faceted interaction situation comes from merging ideas from different disciplines. Interaction is a social phenomena but it is also a psychological (e.g. as it creates feelings within people), linguistic (e.g. language is an important mean for communication and interaction), communicative (e.g. how to make oneself clear and to get messages through to others), biological (e.g. how do our bodies behave and react on a biological level) and even economical (e.g. transactions are made within interactions as one basis for the economical structure). I mean that my concept of IC is the broad concept which is needed in order to analyze interaction from all these perspectives. The concepts of Hymes’ and Goffman/Rawls form important building-blocks within IC; in fact without them the concept of IC would not be possible. These two are the most important for sociological understanding of interaction. However, in order to gain an even fuller picture, there is a need for finding other building blocks for the other two areas of competence. From my two building-blocks, it is possible to make this outline of the concept of IC; in order to make a full definition; more building-blocks would certainly be needed.

In order to be able to analyze and understand the competence needed in interaction, one first has to answer the following questions. Which factors are of importance to understand face-to-face interaction? Which abilities influence how one can participate in different types of interaction situations? What is needed to be able to interact with others? Above I proposed the following simple model.

![Diagram](image-url)

**Fig. 1**

I suggested above that the four categories above following are the main important things to master in order to be competent within interaction; they are the four main areas of competence for face-to-face interaction. The model above is a very simple sketch and these four areas of competence can also be further divided. To Command Language, is about verbal

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52 Which is something I am trying to do in this paper.
language and is divided into the following four subcategories: vocabulary (semantics), grammar (syntax, morphology), knowledge about and ability for use of Young (2000)’s six discourse structuring features and pronunciation. Thus this is both about formal knowledge and ability for use; as I mean, just as Hymes, that it is necessary both to have some knowledge and be able to use it. Without any formal linguistic knowledge, interaction becomes hindered because one has serious problems getting some of one’s messages through. Without being able to use one’s knowledge of the different aspects of interaction, one simply can not communicate verbally. The category Control Body covers everything which is connected to the body and how one acts physically in the interaction. It is divided into movements, gestures, voice/articulation and gaze. Some of these things, the ones that can be seen within the interactive situation are of course of sociological relevance. Others, such as the biological aspects of articulation, are clearly outside the border of what is possible for the sociological study of interaction. Of course, body and language are intertwined, not only within the area of pronunciation/articulation but also in general, as verbal speech depends partly upon non-verbal cues for emphasis, for ‘getting a message through’ and conveying feelings and emotions. It is also very hard, if the interactant has the ability to speak verbally, to interact only with the body without using words. These features can also partly compensate for each other, so that a mastery of body language makes interaction possible, even if the command of linguistic features is low, and vice versa. Language and body therefore support each other closely. The ability to Handle Socio-cultural Knowledge is about knowledge of important social relationships, about how the community is organized and about the culture of the community/group/society. I have chosen to split it into the following sub-categories: customs, beliefs, norms and values; these are what Dundes (1971), a classic within the field of folklore studies, calls “the building-blocks of worldview” (Dundes 1971:96). This category is of course closely related to language use, especially which linguistic forms that are socially accepted. This is also true for body language, where the category body describes abilities to use body language but socio-cultural knowledge is knowledge about the ‘rules’ for physical behaviour in interaction. Finally, the ability to Understand Interaction Order is about understanding the structure of the interaction as a whole. IO can be said to be a uniting concept which is above body language and cultural knowledge and even language. Still, it is an area in its own right, as it is not only a sum of the other ones. Understanding IO includes knowledge/instincts about different interaction orders and how to pick out and use the accepted one. One could ask oneself what then is the difference between this and being able to ‘handle socio-cultural knowledge’. In one way understanding IO is a part of handling socio-cultural knowledge at the same time being able to handle socio-cultural knowledge is also a part of understanding IO. On the other hand, the ‘overlap’ between the two parts is not complete; they are not the same. The main difference is that IO is interaction specific while handling socio-cultural features is something a person does also in non-interactive situations (e.g. when sitting alone in a room reading and interpreting the information in a book one also uses knowledge of the socio-cultural frame) as well. As one can see these aspects of interaction are closely related as they support each other. I have here made some kind of distinction between the features of interaction but in practise, I believe it is often problematic.

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53 Use of the correct language meaning language both as a language such as French or German and as speech genre, type of way of speaking or register and structure of talk. See Bakhtin (2006) for more on speech genre.
54 See this paper, section 2.1.2, or Young (2000:9).
55 Which is closely related to the language category of pronunciation but the difference is that articulation is about the physical ability to articulate different sounds whereas pronunciation is about the knowledge of phonetics and phonology for a given language; thus it is less physical and more knowledge. Voice includes things such as tone and intonation but in a non-linguistic way.
56 See Dundes (1971) for more on this.
57 i.e. situations which does not contain face-to-face interaction.
to do this (especially when looking at what hinders interaction). Still, the different aspects and especially the relations between them are of extreme importance. Through the fact that the aspects are so intertwined one can see the necessity of having this broad perspective; when features are studied in isolation the relations between them are lost and the picture of what happens in interaction becomes too shallow to be of good use.

IC can be understood as the sum of all the above mentioned aspects, i.e. in order to be interaction competent in a given situation, one needs sufficient IC on within all the areas of competence.

My view is that communication and interaction are basically the same\textsuperscript{58}, as when one is interacting one also communicates, and I mean that a proper concept of the competence needed in order to be able to communicate should include all codes of interaction, not only (or primarily) verbal language, as well as all the knowledge needed in order to be able to judge what is proper behaviour in a specific context.

It is not possible within the framework of this paper to make a full definition. Therefore I do not claim to make a full definition or any definition at all; the here-proposed model of the concept of IC is to be seen as an outline of the concept, a brief summary of the most important factors within the concept. The here proposed sketch is intended as a step in the right direction. Some of the aspects of the concepts can be divided \textit{ad infinitum}; what is given here is just a rudimentary division. I see the need to make a clear definition of this concept; interaction is something very complex and any clarification of it needs to be very thorough in order not to become overly simplistic. The intention here is to take a first step in the right direction, a first step which may seem insignificant but which is nonetheless important as it provides a first

\textsuperscript{58} This view can be debated but I mean that it is impossible to interact without communicating and vice versa; the concept of communication seem (intuitively) to involve more of a directed effort, something more conscious. However, an extended discussion of this is clearly not within the scope of this paper, and will therefore have to be left out.
step in the right direction; a direction of studying interaction as the cross-disciplinary phenomenon it truly is. For this purpose, the above proposed model is satisfactory.

Compared to CC, which means more of a linguistic adaptation to the situation (non-linguistic cues are only included when they are in relation to linguistic ones), IC is about how one generally behaves in interaction situations, including verbally. Language thus forms a very important part of interaction behaviour but so does all other three above mentioned areas of competence. Interactants’ IC is what makes interaction possible; without IC one can not interact; all areas of competence influence and complement each other and lacking competence within one area makes interaction complicated, if not impossible.

Following the ideas brought forward by e.g. Young (2000), IC should not be understood as an objective and static kind of knowledge/ability; it is not knowledge about the main cities of Europe or of the distinct syntactical profile of a language as it is written in a book. In one way it is not something which is always the same but rather something highly context-dependent, something which varies with the interaction situation. With this context-dependency comes the notion of sufficient IC; i.e. the necessary IC in order to be able to interact without greater difficulties. What is considered sufficient IC is not static, not something one has or has not, as every situation is slightly different. What constitutes the necessary IC for one situation type might is not the same as for another situation. It depends on the type of situation and on the interactants. Who are the participants, where is the interaction taking place, in which language does the interaction take place; these things are all shaping the interaction competence needed for that situation. Context and situation type is thus an important affecting factor; what is the necessary IC to participate in one situation may not be the right type/level for another situation. The context is shaped partly through little signals that indicate how the context is to be interpreted; what Gumperz calls contextualization cues. This is tied into all the above mentioned aspects; some of these features may have more relevance in one situation, other ones less. Note that I speak about prototypical interaction situations mainly thought of as interaction between more or less unacquainted individuals; in more specific situations, especially between interactants with extensive knowledge of each other’s behaviour, each person will ‘know’ the other’s IC and thus not expect the ‘normal’ behaviour but have a deeper understanding of why that person behaves as s/he does.

Acceptability concerns whether or not the person’s IC, i.e. the actions that it brings, thus the person’s interactional behaviour becomes accepted by the other interactants. IC can thus be ‘rejected’; a person’s actions can be judged to be improper or not suitable for the current situation. Mutual acceptance of the interactants as having the necessary IC in order to participate in the interaction is something I judge to be very important for the outcome of the interaction. With participants not recognizing each other as interaction competent interactants the result may well be failure to interact/communicate. Linked to this is the notion of legitimacy, in order to be accepted ones IC has to be legitimate with regard to that specific situation. Thus IC has to be acceptable as well as sufficient. One could also say, as specifying what is sufficient IC is something very complicated, that sufficient IC simply is acceptable IC, i.e. the IC which becomes accepted.

Every interaction takes place within a context, one which is set by both the current situation, by the participants and by general social structure (outer macro context). The act of acceptance is performed within interaction; within contexts ICs become legitimate and therefore acceptable through the acceptance of other interactants. What can be seen as legitimate is determined by the interactants definition of the context. The shape of the context

59 This should not be viewed as stating that all participants have the same possibilities to accept or reject others’ behaviour and through that judging their IC; as was seen above, having accepted IC includes an aspect of status.
60 As brought forward by Reich & Schirmer (2008).
is also created through showing what the acceptable IC is; thus the act of accepting the IC of an interactant develops the context within which the interaction takes place. Thus acceptability and the context are factors depending on each other. This can be illustrated with the following:

![Diagram of Context and Acceptability](image)

**Fig. 3**

The purpose of the concept of IC is to provide researchers with an analytical tool in order to interpret social situations and especially to understand reasons why there might be frictions and miscommunications. I mean that the concept described in this paper, however diffuse it may be, sketches the ‘true’ interaction competence, a concept which takes into account, not only the verbal communication but all non-verbal cues in the interaction as well as the structure of the interaction as a whole and the background social and cultural knowledge. I mean that this is a very useful concept for understanding what can go wrong in an interaction, especially cross-cultural, pointing towards possible causes for ‘miscommunication’ or communication/interaction failure. Seeing the interaction as a whole consisting of and depending on many aspects can help deepening our understanding of interaction and its many facets.

Interaction can and should be studied from all the above mentioned angles, as well as within all possible disciplines. As a sociologist, however, not all of the above mentioned aspects are possible objects of study for me. I have to focus upon some aspect where sociology can contribute; how sociological understanding can add to the concept of IC and thus to the understanding of face-to-face interaction. Drawing upon insights from sociolinguistics and social interactionism, I mean that the concepts of CC and IO offer the most important building-blocks for the sociological study of interaction. These two perspectives, together focusing upon verbal as well as non-verbal communication, form a broad basis for studying social interaction. Both of these are covered within my frame of IC. CC and the knowledge and insights of the linguists can help gaining understanding of verbal communication and IO, acknowledging non-verbal communicative cues as well as the structure of the interaction as a whole, can give insights where CC can not. These concepts, thus, complement each other. With some additions, they form the basis for my concept of IC.

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61 See section 3.1 for Thomas (1990)’s definition.
62 This is taken to include the modifications of Young (2000) as well.
5. Conclusion: How IC can contribute to the understanding of Interaction

Within this section some concluding remarks about this paper will be made. Some areas of further study which I find relevant will be taken up, as well as I will point out some problems of this paper.

Within this paper I have proposed and sketched the concept of Interaction Competence. Existing concepts for describing the competence needed in order to be able to interact have often failed to describe the dynamic, multi-faceted nature of interaction; there has been a tendency to try to explain everything with just one factor. My concept accounts for all the factors within interaction, partly through acknowledging the importance of all codes and aspects of communication and partly by having a truly interactionist perspective; one which sees the importance of the context for what is a sufficient IC. Sufficient IC is created within context and is tightly linked to the concept of acceptability. Sufficient IC can thus be seen as socially dependent, as depending upon whether or not the IC can be seen as acceptable and be accepted as sufficient. Within this paper two important building-blocks for constructing the concept of IC have been described. Even though these two building-blocks together indirectly give the four areas of competence a weakness of this paper is that the areas of body and socio-cultural knowledge have not been described in detail. I mean that CC and IO are the most relevant parts of study from a sociological, interactionist perspective and therefore I chose to focus this paper upon the concepts of Hymes and Goffman/Rawls. What is important is to remember that the other two areas are of the same importance if one’s goal is to gain a complete (if this is at all possible) understanding of what interaction is and what is needed in order to be able to interact. It is important for further study concerning the concept of IC is to include knowledge from all areas of the interaction. Otherwise one will not be able to have the broad perspective needed in order to fully understand interaction.

With this paper I intended to outline the concept of IC and to take a step in the direction of a more multi-disciplinary thinking within the study of interaction. The topic of face-to-face interaction is of relevance for all organization of social life and thus for sociology as a whole. In order to be able to interact, one needs sufficient and acceptable IC; if the ICs of two participants are too different and they are completely unaware of this, it will be very hard for them to interact. Because of this my concept of IC has the possibility to help the analyst who tries to understand dysfunctional interaction situations, as it offers an explanation of why in some cases interaction fails. The concept of IC is thought of as an analytical tool, to be used to analyse the competence needed in order to interact, including also the factors of context and acceptability. Still, it can also be used to raise awareness of one’s own interaction practises within everyday-life situations. If people, in their everyday lives, understand that others have different interaction competencies and that within these competencies behaviours may have different meaning, this may reduce stereotypes and lead to a better understanding and acceptance of divergent interactive behaviour. Thus, the concept of IC can also be used outside the academia.

From the outline within this paper, I see foremost two areas of relevance for further study. The first is to make a more detailed, theoretical description of the concept. This includes defining it, taking all sides of interaction into consideration, as well as further research into the affect of context and acceptability (as well as other possibly relevant affecting factors). I see a need to be more theoretically specified; to analyze deeper the nature of this competence, combining knowledge from more disciplines than just sociology and
linguistics, and through this gain more insight into how IC is constructed as an analytical tool and as a theoretical concept.

The second area is empirical research with a focus upon dysfunctional interaction. This is especially important with respect to how the notion of what makes up sufficient IC varies with context as well as how acceptability and the factual acceptance work within real face-to-face interaction. Cross-cultural interaction could provide many possibilities to study this, especially in cases where one or some of the interactants belong to a majority group with a higher status position (so that they are in the position to decide what is acceptable when interacting in their language in their community). It would be interesting to see what role the notion of acceptable IC plays in situations of discrimination or disrespect. I have tried within this paper to show the relevance of the concept of IC but in order to fully do so one would need to make empirical research and find situations where IC can help explain miscommunications. Another interesting empirical angle (which is partly outside of what sociologists can do and would thus require a multi-disciplinary research team) is to study interactants who, due to neurological reasons, partly or completely lack IC, e.g. people with Asperger’s syndrome or autism. This may give further insights in how IC works in everyday life and why it is so important for the outcome of interactive situations.

Concluding, I want to emphasis the importance of face-to-face interaction as a domain of relevance for sociological study. Even though in the society of today, a lot of interaction takes place through phone or e-mail, thus without seeing the other interactant, face-to-face interaction still forms the nucleus of social relationships and thus is the basis for the formation of society and therefore shapes social structure. In order to understand human behaviour and the construction of society; i.e. social life, the importance of studying interaction can not be overemphasized. When studying interaction, I mean that a broad, open perspective is necessary. I have outlined a concept based upon this broad perspective, built upon knowledge from more than one discipline, and I mean that this is the main strength of my concept. The concept of IC is a highly relevant one; without IC interaction is not possible. Because of this I see the necessity of more research around this concept. This paper has provided a relevant beginning for this research, a step in what I consider to be the right direction, but there is a need for further research into all the parts of the interactive situation. I hope that this paper and the multi-facial concept of Interaction Competence will inspire more work with the here-proposed broad and dynamic perspective upon interaction.
References


