Language Awareness and the Acquisition of Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Introduction

In this chapter, we analyse the relationships and connections between the concept of language awareness (LA) and intercultural communicative competence. In particular, the relationship between LA and critical cultural awareness will be at the centre of the discussion but we will first consider the terms intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and intercultural competence (IC), of which critical cultural awareness is a fundamental element.

The most immediate connection between LA on the one hand and ICC and IC on the other needs to be seen in the context of the relationship between language and culture, but we must also consider in what ways ‘awareness of language’ and ‘awareness of culture’ are different and similar. We will then discuss the implications of this analysis for foreign language education with respect to teaching and assessment.

Defining Intercultural Competence and Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural competence (IC) is a term which became widely used in foreign language education from the 1990s onwards, although the discussion around the teaching of ‘culture’ – whether this word is used, or other terms such as ‘civilisation’ (French) or ‘Landeskunde’ (German) – as part of language education is much older (Risager, 2006, 2007). Similarly, theories and models of intercultural competence – whether this phrase is used or not – in other disciplines have existed at least since the 1950s (Byram and Guilherme, 2010). Moreover, in the foreign language field, the term ‘intercultural communicative competence’ (ICC) is often used, after Byram (1997) introduced this term to specify the role that learning and speaking a foreign language can play in the development of intercultural competence and vice versa.

The distinction between IC and ICC is therefore important, especially for language learning and teaching. With ICC, there is a particular focus on culturally sensitive interaction in a foreign language, with connections to the concept of communicative...
competence in language learners (Savignon, 2013). IC, on the other hand, is a competence which is relevant in many fields and professions such as human resource management, anthropology, psychology, communication studies (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009) and does not necessarily have a focus on foreign language learning or use. It may, then, be developed in other disciplines as well as in foreign language teaching.

Both terms became the focus of debates in foreign language education when the term competence was nascent in education generally (Fleming, 2011: 4). However, in more recent writing, some authors have distanced themselves from notions of competence all together, preferring the term ‘interculturality’, and yet others have sought to distance themselves from ‘inter’, preferring the notion of ‘transcultural’ (Blell and Doff, 2014), which appears to better fit a post-structuralist understanding of the fluidity of culture.

Furthermore, although ‘intercultural’ is sometimes used interchangeably with ‘cross-cultural’, ‘multicultural’ and ‘transcultural’, at other times it is used purposefully to distinguish it from those other terms (Barrett, 2013; Boye, 2016). There is also the issue of the “tired old notion” (Latour, 2009) of ‘culture’ itself, which is defined very differently in different fields as well as being an overworked lay term; we shall return to this below.

With regard to the term ‘competence’, whilst there is some merit in the critiques of competence approaches, they remain valid if not understood narrowly. For example, the criticism that descriptions of competence focus on mechanical performances or actions and therefore ignore the domain of understanding and mental capacity is unfounded if one accepts that knowledge and understanding are necessary for competence to be displayed in performance (Armstrong, 1995 in Fleming, 2011: 7). Certainly, competence theory is used and useful in education planning.

However, even with the help of competence theory, defining IC is widely considered to be problematic (Deardorff, 2006; Dervin, 2010; Byram, 2011). There are several reasons for this. Although it is easy to agree that IC is made up of many sub-competences and includes attitudes and skills, agreeing on precisely which aspects are important or fundamental is not as easy. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009: 36–43) list dozens of terms used by a multiplicity of authors to show the diversity but, as they say, also to show that there may be much common ground labelled in many different ways. Similarly, in preparation for the publication of a model of ‘Competences for Democratic Culture’, a Council of Europe working group reviewed and listed 101 competence schemes (Council of Europe, 2016) and ultimately settled on 20 competences which encapsulate the common ground and which are ‘teachable, learnable and assessable’ in one or more disciplines of the school curriculum.

For our purposes, we take a definition which was devised for and from language teaching: “Intercultural competence is the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures that we recognize as being different from our own” (Guilherme, 2004: 297). The important point here is that intercultural competence comes into play in a relationship when ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’ are salient (Huber and Reynolds, 2014: 23). Such salience is often marked by linguistic difference, either in terms of language variety – difference in accent or dialect – or in terms of a different, ‘foreign’ language.

A definition of intercultural ‘communicative’ competence is now more straightforward. It is a matter of how interculturally competent someone is when they are using a foreign language, and this will depend on their communicative competence in that particular language. So ICC can be seen as the bidirectional flow of intercultural competence and communicative competence in any foreign language user, the analysis of
which has to be partly in terms of the relationship between language and culture. At the same time, an analysis of an intercultural interaction where participants are drawing on their ICC must take into consideration the significance not just of one language user and their ICC but of all interlocutors, since the success of the interaction depends on and is perceived by more than one participant. For, in an intercultural interaction, some of the language users may be utilising their ICC and others ‘only’ their IC, i.e. the former would be using a foreign language and the latter would be speaking a language which is their first or dominant language. Even a person using their first/dominant language may contribute to the success of the interaction by drawing on their sensitivity to the demands made on their partner who is using a foreign language. It is at this point that questions relating to the language and culture awareness of language users can be particularly pertinent.

Awareness of Language and Awareness of Culture

If language awareness is, according to the Association of Language Awareness, “explicit knowledge about language and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use” (Garrett and James, 2000: 330), then it might seem possible to replace the word ‘language’ with the word ‘culture’ to provide a definition of awareness of culture or ‘cultural awareness’. Yet, there is a need for further refinement, particularly with regard to the significance of knowledge about culture. Cultural awareness can be seen as in a dichotomy with cultural knowledge. Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004: 6) make this distinction by arguing that knowledge is what can be transferred to the learner, is external and static, stereotypical and reductive, whereas awareness is best conceived as learners’ perceptions which emerge through intercultural experiences and are therefore dynamic and internal. In foreign language learning, they say, cultural knowledge is likely to be simplified and generalized, so it can be articulated and transferred to learners in spoken and written form. This also means that it can be out of date. On the other hand, cultural awareness is variable, as it is modified through experience, multi-dimensional and interactive. This distinction is helpful when considering the way that culture is presented in foreign language education textbooks and other resources in contrast to the way students experience and learn from intercultural experiences.

In a similar vein, Byram’s (1997, 2009a) model also distinguishes a separate sub-competence of ‘knowledge’ from attitudes, skills and awareness, and crucially adds the term ‘critical’ to ‘cultural awareness’ (CA) (Figure 27.1).

As this visual representation of the model demonstrates, Critical Cultural Awareness (CCA) is a crucial element in the model as it is deliberately placed at the centre of the diagram. CCA is “an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries” (Byram, 1997: 63). This is more than cultural awareness in the sense of knowledge and sensitivity to a phenomenon such as language, which we found in the definition of language awareness. First, it is closely connected to citizenship education, and to the development of critical thinking skills that allow language users to make judgements about phenomena they encounter (Byram, 2009a). Second, it emphasizes that the critical thinking should be directed as much at ‘perspectives, practices and products’ of one’s own culture as at those of other cultures, and that critical thinking or criticality is a consequence of a comparative juxtaposition of an aspect of another culture with an aspect of one's own. As Baker (2012) points out, with CCA, Byram’s intention is not to simplify the relationship
between language and culture, but to emphasize “the need to understand the multivoiced ‘diglossic’ nature of culture, which contains conflicting and contradictory views” (Baker, 2012: 65). However, Baker does go on to question what he sees as the limitations to CCA when it is seen in terms of the cultures of national groups, which Byram, though he explicitly recognizes that any social group has its own constantly changing culture, emphasizes as the concern of foreign language teachers. Baker points out that such an understanding of culture does not adequately provide for contexts where English (or, we would add, any other language) is taught as a lingua franca (ELF) and used in global contexts. Baker offers an alternative, intercultural awareness (ICA):

Intercultural awareness is a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices, and frames of understanding can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication.

Baker, 2012: 66

For the same reasons, Blell and Doff propose ‘transcultural communicative competence’ and within it, critical transcultural awareness and, as with Baker, Byram’s model of ICC is built on rather than replaced (Blell and Doff, 2014). However, what is emphasized
with all these concepts is that ‘culture’ be understood in a non-essentialist way, and that a critical awareness of the intercultural/transcultural/cultural dimension that is present in interactions in a foreign language be central to a model for teaching and learning foreign languages.

We saw at the beginning of this section that LA involves explicit knowledge about, and perceptions and sensitivity towards, language in language teaching and learning and in language use. There is an analogy with CA and we can say, with Baker, that “CA is a conscious understanding of the role culture plays in language learning and communication (in both first and foreign languages)” (2012-bib-02: 65). To this, we can now add that CA should be ‘critical’, and that this too should become a part of ‘conscious understanding’, as a consequence of language teaching and learning. Baker goes on to say that in teaching CA in a foreign language curriculum there should be an explicit focus on the relationship between language and culture. It is to this that we need to turn next.

Language and Culture – the Language-Culture Nexus

The literature on ‘culture’ is legion but Kramsch (1998a) and Risager (2006: 32–53) provide accounts of the issues and debates that are useful for language teachers. The discussion of the relationship between language and culture is just as complex and long-standing as that about culture, and it is important to note that it is relevant to all kinds of languages and language varieties. Since all social groups have their own cultures and languages or language varieties, and since people belong to many groups, they will constantly draw upon different languages and/or language varieties. For example, they may speak with one variety of a language when in their sporting group but then, when interacting in their church/synagogue/mosque/temple with people of their religious group, they may use a different variety of that same language. However, the issue has been most often dealt with when it is not just a matter of different varieties of one language but of two distinct languages associated with distinct groups, especially national groups. Both pragmatically and uncontroversially, this focus on national groups is an approach with which foreign language education has operated for many decades and can be traced to the years of the Reform Movement, the change to an emphasis on oral proficiency following Wilhelm Viëtor’s call for a new direction for language teaching (Risager, 2007: 26ff; Schilder, 2013; Smith, 2007).

Risager (2006) provides language teachers with the most thorough analysis of the issues and the history of the discussion, and in a second volume (Risager, 2007) presents a case for ways to move from a national to a transnational paradigm. She analyses the relationship of language and culture from three perspectives (2006: 110–136):

• First, linguistic practice or the sociological perspective, where language and culture are separable – people use the same language in different contexts to refer to and express different contents – this is most evident in the use of English and Englishes but is also found in other languages.

• Second, linguistic resources or the psychological perspective where, in the life of the individual person, language and culture or, better, cultural experience, are inseparable for that individual and are ultimately unique to the individual.

• Third, linguistic system, where we might analyse and describe the grammar of a language but there is no necessary relationship to a cultural context; such a relationship is only present and created in linguistic practice.
It is the second of these which we experience as individuals and which Hoffman describes in her autobiography. She describes her first experience of learning English, having moved from Poland to Canada about the age of 12:

The words I learn now don’t stand for things in the same unquestioned way they did in my native tongue. ‘River’ in Polish was a vital sound, energized with the sense of riverhood, of my rivers, of my being immersed in rivers. ‘River’ in English is cold – a word without an aura. It has no accumulated associations for me, and it does not give off the radiating haze of connotation. It does not evoke.


When we apply these insights to language teaching and learning, there is a tradition of suggesting that learners should acquire new linguistic resources that are modelled on those of ‘the native speaker’. For the tradition of taking the native speaker as an ideal or model (Davies, 2003; Medgyes, 2013), although most often used with respect to mastery of grammar and production, also implies that learners use the semantics of a language in the same way as a/the native speaker. Hoffman’s example, which reveals how idiosyncratic the relationship between language and culture can be in the individual’s psychology, suggests that the notorious difficulty of defining a native speaker and their grammatical and phonetic competence is even more complex in semantics. On the other hand, Hoffman’s account does not include allusion to the necessary common ground that all Polish speakers would share in their understanding of ‘rzeka’. Yet such common ground necessarily exists since all Polish speakers have a shared understanding of ‘rzeka’ without which there would be no communication.

When Baker recommends that language teaching and learning should include developing a conscious understanding of the relationship between language and culture in the language being learnt and learners’ own language(s), it might mean that the issues raised by Risager and illustrated by Hoffman should be addressed, as we shall see below.

**Symbolic Competence**

A useful theoretical framework for bringing together awareness of language and awareness of culture is Kramsch’s concept of ‘symbolic competence’. The thrust of Kramsch’s argument is that intercultural competence is located in discourse, in interaction, and that the implications of this are often overlooked. Whereas Byram’s (1997) model of ICC locates IC in foreign language education and foreign language use, Kramsch locates it in the analysis of discourse and multilingualism. By analysing data collected from multilingual exchanges using discourse analysis and complexity theory (Kramsch and Whiteside, 2008), Kramsch describes symbolic competence as “awareness of the symbolic value of words, ability to find the most appropriate subject position, ability to grasp larger social and historical significance of events and to understand the cultural memories evoked by symbolic systems, ability to perform and create alternative realities by reframing the issues” (Kramsch, 2009a: 113). This means that in the praxis of language – particularly in multilingual praxis – a strong connection is made between cultural awareness and language choices which, she argues, are built into the fabric of multilingual exchanges.

With Kramsch’s symbolic competence there is again a focus on knowledge, because for a language user to engage with his or her interlocutor they must pick up
on the symbolic resonances of the language chosen. In Byram’s model of ICC, there is also reference to more than just knowledge of one’s own and other cultures, but also knowledge of social interaction: knowledge “of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction” (Byram, 1997: 58), but Kramsch goes further. For example in her analysis of a discussion between a US news anchor and two American Catholic priests about a speech by Pope Benedict XVI to the American people, she says that the knowledge required of language learners is “not just knowing the facts of grammar, vocabulary and pragmatics, and not only a general psychological knowledge of self and other, but understanding [say] German-American relations during and after WWII [and] the current perceptions of the United States around the world” (Kramsch, 2009a: 107). Through this knowledge, language users can be culturally and linguistically aware, and the extent of their awareness can be seen in the language choices they make. The kind of knowledge Kramsch expects of learners is therefore different from, and more than might be expected of, native speakers. Kramsch (1998b) had already embraced the notion of the ‘intercultural speaker’ to capture this.

The Intercultural Speaker

The aim that learners of another language should become, or attempt to become, native speakers, has long dominated language teaching and been implanted in the minds of most language learners. Whatever the merits of this aim with respect to mastery of the grammar and phonology of a language, intercultural competence is a different matter. This is why the phrase ‘intercultural speaker’ was coined (Byram, 2008: 57–77), to indicate that intercultural competence is worthwhile in itself and should not be considered a poor imitation of native speaker competence. The intercultural speaker has intercultural communicative competence, i.e. both intercultural competence and linguistic/communicative competence in a foreign language, to help them in intercultural interaction and this is something different from, and not comparable with, the competence of a monolingual native speaker. Even when not using their linguistic/communicative competence, an intercultural speaker is more likely to be able to interact with people of another language and culture more successfully than a monolingual speaker who has limited intercultural competence. Reasons for this are that a monolingual speaker has not necessarily had the opportunity to develop the attitudes of curiosity and openness or the skills of interpreting/relating and discovery which are crucial for success.

It is surprising that many attempts to conceptualize and model the competences needed by those who wish to engage in intercultural communication and relationships do not take account of linguistic competence. In a major review of models of intercultural competence, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009: 10) decided to classify models as “compositional, co-orientational, developmental, adaptational, and causal process”. Most models are primarily concerned with psychological traits, with adaptation to new circumstances and/or to change over time, and are often focused on describing the processes involved in longer or shorter sojourns in an environment that is experienced as culturally and perhaps linguistically different and challenging. It is only in the “co-orientational” models “devoted to conceptualizing the interactional achievement of intercultural understanding” that linguistic competences are found.
After the initial coining of the phrase, the value of the concept of intercultural speaker was noted by Kramsch:

In the increasingly grey zones of our multilingual, multicultural societies, the dichotomy between native versus non-native speakers has outlived its use. Both native speakers and non-native speakers potentially belong to several speech communities of which they are the more or less recognized, more or less unrecognized members. Instead of a pedagogy oriented toward the native speaker, then, we may want to devise a pedagogy oriented toward the intercultural speaker.

Kramsch, 1998b: 27

Since then the phrase has been widely used and discussed, increasingly without reference to its origins, and as an accepted counterpoint to ‘native speaker’, as an internet search quickly establishes.

In sum, to be considered a competent intercultural speaker, a language user must possess an awareness of language, culture and languaculture that a monolingual native speaker need not possess to be considered a competent native speaker. Therefore, judging language users only according to their ‘nativeness’ and failing to acknowledge their ICC is an issue that those working in intercultural language education seek to address, but Kramsch’s call for a new pedagogy has hitherto been at best only partially met.

Awareness of Language and Culture in Intercultural Communicative Competences

We have seen the term ‘intercultural speaker’ was coined to ensure a distance from ‘the native speaker’ as a model for intercultural communicative competence. It did not explicitly address the relationship of language and culture and what competence or awareness a learner might acquire with respect to the relationship of language and culture, the language-culture nexus. On the other hand, Risager (2006) does focus on the significance of this nexus and recommends the neologism ‘languaculture’ (or ‘linguaculture’) developed by Friedrich (1986) and Agar (1994) to encapsulate the relationship between language and culture as experienced by the individual in their languages and language varieties. In this view, an intercultural speaker might be expected to have sensitivity to and conscious knowledge of their languacultures, an awareness that their interlocutor’s languacultures will vary from their own, and a curiosity to explore languacultures and contemplate their significance (Agar, 1994).

Whereas LA teaching may focus on developing knowledge about language and language learning, for example as originally suggested by Hawkins (1987), we argue that, because knowledge about cultural values, beliefs and behaviours and about modes of social interaction is already an element of IC, it is important now to develop an awareness of the language-culture nexus, of languaculture, to complement the existing model of ICC. To encapsulate this the term ‘languaculture awareness’ is suggested.

By analogy with Garrett and James’ (2000) definition of LA cited earlier we can define languaculture awareness (LCA) as “explicit knowledge about the language-culture nexus and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use”. On this basis, we can then discuss the role of language awareness and
in particular languaculture awareness in the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence, since languaculture awareness complements both cultural knowledge and critical cultural awareness.

In order to address the pedagogical question of what role LA or Languaculture Awareness (LCA) might take in the acquisition of ICC, Byram (2012: 7) refers to Risager’s analysis and suggests there is a need for “analysis and reflection on the social and psychological dimensions of the language–culture nexus”. For example:

it would be analysis and reflection which would make [learners] conscious of the specificity of the relationship of a language to its context, French in Canada or Cameroon as opposed to French in France for example, i.e. the sociological dimension of the language–culture nexus. Analysis and reflection would also make them conscious of the psychological significance of their own use of language, whether first, second or foreign, and reveal inter alia the significance of a language in their personal and social identity.

Byram, 2012: 7

When this is combined with critical cultural awareness – the critique of one’s own as well as others’ cultural perspectives, practices and products – then learners might be expected to develop an ability to analyze, and a sensitivity to, the specificity of languacultural dimensions of the languages they are learning and using, and this may provide a practical approach to teaching symbolic competence and LCA.

Furthermore, it is important to extend LCA to include not just the significance of the language user’s own language choices, whether first, second or third language, but also that of their interlocutors. For the psychological significance of one interlocutor’s use of language is also an element of symbolic competence. Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) describe Maya-speaking immigrants from Yucatan, Mexico, living in California, and analyse an exchange between a Maya-speaker and a Chinese butcher. In this situation, the social actors display what we would call LCA since, in an intercultural exchange, a language user must co-construct meaning with their interlocutor but they must also co-construct the identity projections that they wish to make and accommodate the identity projections which their interlocutor seeks to co-construct. This can be seen when the Chinese butcher says his name, which is a Spanish name, and the Maya-speaker understands the significance of this in terms of the identity the butcher wishes to project.

To take another example, for which foreign language learners are often prepared by their teachers: when asking for directions in a foreign language whilst on holiday, communication can be effective and appropriate if meaning is co-constructed and nobody is offended in the process. This kind of exchange is often described in terms of communicative competence, but successful intercultural interaction is dependent on the learner’s symbolic competence, or LCA, which requires a sensitivity to their own language choices and those of others. It might be necessary for example with some Flemish-speaking Belgians to explain that one is from another country if one wishes to address them in French as they may assume that one is a French-speaking Belgian and react negatively. Similar situations exist elsewhere and awareness of the languaculture nexus – and of such issues as identity projection through language choice – is an aspect of language learning which distinguishes between communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence.
Teaching Languacultural Awareness

The discussion now turns to how LCA can be taught within foreign language education. Up until now, the practical realization of teaching for ICC development in the foreign language classroom has been through the use of critical incidents, through role-plays and through the teaching of literature (see for example http://teachingenglishmf.weebly.com/icc.html). Another method for teaching ICC is to facilitate encounters with speakers of the foreign language being learned, traditionally through exchange visits and ‘pen pal’ schemes and, more recently, through digital exchange and telecollaboration (O’Dowd, 2012). There has also been a strong emphasis on developing learners’ ethnographic skills to reflect on and write about intercultural exchanges in which learners participate (Roberts et al., 2001). This has led to initiatives like the Council of Europe’s Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (Council of Europe, 2014). Below, a telecollaboration project between students of English in Argentina and students of Spanish in the UK (Porto, forthcoming) will be used to explore the possibilities of developing LCA in intercultural foreign language education. With the advent of learning platforms like Moodle or PBWorks and social media like Skype, real time telecollaboration between learners who are geographically far apart has become a reality and there is a growing body of examples of classroom praxis and research that point towards its potential for teaching ICC within a foreign language curriculum (O’Dowd, 2012).

In a project created by a network of foreign language teacher-researchers (Byram et al., 2017), the internet played a substantial role in several experiences of bringing students from different countries and continents together to investigate a social issue and respond by taking ‘action in the community’. The process in one of the examples involved university students of English in Argentina and of Spanish in Britain in online interactions where sometimes they used Spanish and sometimes English – thus sometimes using the language they were learning and sometimes their first language – to talk about issues and plan their activities in their respective communities (Yulita and Porto, 2017). After the project was completed the Argentinian learners were asked to complete the Council of Europe’s Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters. This led in some cases to a raising to awareness of the processes involved. There is evidence firstly of students making conscious efforts to avoid speaking as if to another native speaker and thus revealing an intercultural speaker competence:

I always tried to sound polite and I tried to make myself clear. When we spoke in English I tried to maintain a particular accent and if I didn’t know a word, I asked my partners for help. Also, when I spoke in Spanish, I tried to talk slower so [name of British peer] could understand what I was saying. I tried to use a neutral accent without using any Argentinian idioms

Emilia, Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters

In the first part of what this student says, the reference to ‘maintain(ing) a particular accent’ suggests that the learner is aware of the identity that is projected by accent in English. This is reinforced by her conscious adoption of a ‘neutral accent’ in Spanish and her awareness of the specificity of Argentinian idioms. In another case, the student makes explicit reference to the teaching that has made her conscious of language and her ability to name strategies helps her to use them consciously:
I have never experienced a situation like this but I tried to keep in mind that communication is a matter of negotiation and so I used the notions that I learned in English Language II [the course in which this project was implemented], such as the cooperative principle, politeness strategies, territorial drives, etc. 

*Faustina, Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*

These examples are indications of LA but extracts from online interactions show the students analysing the language-culture nexus by comparative study:

Testimonios? How do you say testimonio? Like something someone says as regards an event…The word in Spanish is testimonio…I mean there’s the word ‘testimony’, but I don’t think if it’s…It has something to do with the law…If you like steal something and then you have to say what happened and you put a testimony.

In this case, where the learners were advanced users of language and had also had some instruction in linguistic analysis, the teachers had taught LCA by facilitation of learning, by creating a situation in which the students taught and learned from each other. In other cases, such as the earlier example of beginners learning to ask the way, it would be necessary to create a more structured learning context, where learners would be taught to notice and analyse in much the same way as LA teaching often does. The methods used in LA teaching can be adapted to focus on the language-culture nexus and on projections of identity.

With respect to identity projection, in the same Argentinian-English project, there is evidence of learners’ awareness of how they were forming a new international identity in their working groups and of the importance of understanding the other person’s point of view:

I think my peers and I were international peers since we were all completely committed to do this project and we contributed with what we knew or investigated more. We divided the tasks and we all did it on time and with great enthusiasm. I found myself wanting to know more about [name]’s culture and points of view.

*Andrea, Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*

And in the following extract from an online interaction we can see the English student seeking to understand how their Argentinian counterpart has acquired their perspective on historical events, both from schooling and from socialization in the family:

ENG: Is this something you learn about in history?
ARG1: Yeah, we generally learn it in school, but it’s not as deep as…I don’t know why, but…
ARG2: Maybe we *learn more from our parents*, from their experience, from *em*, for example, I don’t know, my grandpa who has a particular experience about that time, maybe you learn that way *more than in school*.
ARG1: Everybody here has some kind of connection with that period in our country, so you *have stories around, is more likely to learn about that, that way*.

*Porto and Byram, 2015: 10*
Here, telecollaboration has been the focus and the data shows some of the ways in which students can develop an awareness of language and culture, and importantly, of languaculture, through a telecollaborative project in a classroom setting. Using other popular methods in intercultural learning could be just as effective for the development of languaculture awareness. Through the study of literature in a foreign language or with real-time contact with speakers of other languages, there are opportunities for learners to explore the language-culture nexus in discourse as well as examine their own psychological relationship with languaculture in an educational setting.

**Assessment**

So far in this chapter we have discussed ways to conceptualize languaculture awareness, as a concept which gives greater emphasis to language competence in intercultural communication, and the potential pedagogy for the integration of LA and ICC, with some evidence of how learners can become aware of questions of identity.

The assessment of ICC and particularly of critical cultural awareness is a major conundrum in foreign language education. There has been a lot of debate about how to, even if to, assess ICC and CCA and a summary will be offered here. Connections will be drawn between the ways language and cultural awareness are assessed and how they might be assessed as languacultural awareness.

Aspects of intercultural competence can be found described in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001) and Michael Byram, together with Geneviève Zarate, was tasked with defining IC (Byram, 2009a: 322) and producing hierarchical descriptors for this competence, to be used alongside the descriptors for linguistic and pragmatic competences as a means of assessing students’ levels and achievements in their language learning. However, for IC, no such hierarchical descriptors could be agreed upon (Byram, 2009b: 215); the immediate issue was to clarify how IC might be understood in a language learning and teaching context. This is already telling in itself, but since then Fantini (2009) and Deardorff (2009) have moved the discussion forward by acknowledging the complexity of assessing intercultural competence. Fantini (2009: 460) emphasizes the importance of the integration of assessment with “every other aspect of the educational system” and analyses the factors which need to be taken into consideration. Deardorff (2009: 477–8) argued that experts are in strong agreement about a number of different means and approaches to assessment and discusses how the process might be developed in an assessment team, thus recognizing that the complexity cannot be handled by any single teacher-assessor. Although there are some in the field who see ICC as something impossible to assess (Dervin, 2010), there are current projects in the USA led by a team of educators in the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (www.actfl.org) and Europe with recent developments at the Council of Europe (www.coe.int/lang), which attempt to define criteria and place them on a scale, but it is premature to suggest that these will be successful.

Despite the continuing attempts to find ways to make the assessment of ICC a real possibility and move it beyond self-assessment, very few assessment opportunities for ICC have been integrated into course and assessment design in secondary and tertiary language education in a widespread or meaningful way. Byram stated in 2009 that he detected “hardly any signs of a will to assess” (2009b: 216) in education. About the
same time, Kramsch argued for a pragmatic approach when it comes to the assessment of ICC and said that what cannot be tested should still be taught: “We should then measure what can legitimately be measured and refuse to measure the rest, even though it is essential that we teach it” (Kramsch, 2009b: 119). Kramsch is not alone in this view; in a forthcoming book, edited by Dervin and Gross (in press), there is a call to abandon the idea that ICC can be summatively assessed.

However, the current efforts of ACTFL and the Council of Europe are indications that a top-down pressure to integrate teaching ICC into school curricula by providing more explicit guidance for assessment may be what forces change. European institutions see the development of descriptive graded criteria for teaching and assessing the intercultural competence required for dialogue and ‘democratic culture’ as ever more urgent in the changing socio-political climate in Europe and in the wake of increased terrorist threats and attacks on European soil (Council of Europe, 2016).

Conclusions

We began this chapter as an exploration of the potential relationship between Language Awareness and the acquisition of Intercultural Communicative Competence, but we have seen that the relationship of awareness with acquisition is not simple because the relationship between the two concepts of LA and ICC is itself complex. Our exploration has led to the suggestion that language learners need to acquire Languaculture Awareness as well as or, better, as integral with, the acquisition of ICC. This proposal is derived from the close relationship – and for individual learners, the insoluble relationship – between language and culture, between language forms and their meanings. By taking into account the concept of symbolic competence, Languaculture Awareness can also include language learners’ attempts to project identities through language choices and learners’ ability to make sense of the identity projections and language choices of their interlocutors.

The significance of this argument for pedagogy is that the aims and methods of teaching LA can be extended to pay particular attention to LCA. In addition, however, it is important to note that insofar as LCA is part of an approach to teaching ICC which emphasizes criticality and ‘critical cultural awareness’, then LCA should lead to a critical awareness and understanding of languaculture in a learner’s own society as well as in others’. Criticality may then lead to action in society if and when learners recognize that there are phenomena that need improvement. Such outcomes are already present in teaching ‘intercultural citizenship’ (Byram et al., 2017) and in this respect LA and ICC are complemented and enriched by new developments.

Related Topics

Languaculture; cultural awareness; assessment

References


