

LINGUISTIC EDUCATION AND INTERCULTURALITY

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Abstract: *The present paper is an introduction to the main aspects between language learning and intercultural factors. The map of the concepts that follows and the reconstruction of synthesis factors that characterize interculturality, in relation to disparate and continually developing factors, is a key reference of the essay, which examines specifically some aspects.*

Specific recent literature on the theme of the relation between language learning and cultural/intercultural dimensions has also been used.

Keywords: *education, intercultural competence, knowledge, linguistic dimension, communication.*

Teacher training, today more than ever, has to deal with skills linked to an intercultural communicative process. In this context, however, we have decided to analyse intercultural dimension areas, which certainly are not exhaustive regarding the phenomenon, but are, anyway, pre-eminent in the determination of the reasons why intercultural dimensions are a fundamental requirement on the learning and teaching of languages.

A certain attention is given to the urgency to innovate the processes of learning. It is held to be desirable to use approaches to teaching that integrate linguistic education and input of content concerning the social context and the context of integration, which are currently considered extremely episodic. A certain amount of attention is dedicated to better exploitation of the places of informal and non-formal learning.

An aspect around which significant concurrence is reported regards the necessity to improve the competence in intercultural relating of teachers. Teacher training in the area of intercultural competence should serve to create widespread awareness, avoiding a delegation of the functions of contact to just the cultural mediators.

A plurality of languages implies a plurality of visions, and makes it necessary to strive to widen one's point of observation in order to have a dialogue with various cultural systems and codes of behaviour.

The experience of exchanges and partnerships within the *Socrates and Erasmus*

Programmes often leads to the exposure to a new language and another culture, as has been shown in the survey with the selected subjects. The experiences of encounter and the direct contacts with people belonging to other cultures obviously do not guarantee, because of the mere fact of taking place, the ability to adopt different points of view and willingness to respect differences; on the contrary, the exact opposite phenomenon can occur, of imperviousness, if experiences and encounters are not accompanied by true interventions of teaching interculturality. Attitudes of defence of one's identity can be produced as a result of the inability to understand the culture of the other person beyond the filter of one's own culture.

Four issues hold up an education that is intercultural, pluralistic, and respectful of differences:

- giving positive value, subjectively and objectively, to socio-cultural and linguistic minorities: not excluding minority languages, supporting the efforts of integration (not assimilation) by teaching the local language, opposing ethnocentric and lingocentric attitudes and contemptuous attitudes towards other languages and socio-cultures, giving positive value to multilingualism of every individual and of the group;

- opening up the contents of teaching, implying (in a positive way) a plurality of cultures and of languages: change from a mono-cultural perspective to a multiple perspective (in every subject: history, literature, music, art etc.);

- teaching social, communicative and intercultural competence (educating regarding meta-communication in daily life, resorting to the analysis of films and TV footage: the images illustrate more than words), teaching educators to acquire a greater intercultural competence;

- educating with regard to the plurality of ideas, criticism, and democratic dialogue.

This last purpose of education is proclaimed in every educational system in every democratic country. However, the dimension of socio-cultural diversity is usually neglected. Instead, particular attention is necessary in the interactions with the pupils and in the teaching of every subject. Constructing intercultural competence means also favouring an openness of the educational curriculum to a plurality of languages:

- discovering and accepting alteration through the study of languages;
- deconstructing and going beyond lingocentrism;
- understanding the value of the plurality of cultures and of the pluralism of ideas;

- giving oneself instruments for intercultural and international communication;

- becoming more competitive in the labour market.

Various elements thus cause us to believe that language teaching oriented towards the promotion of multilingualism is important. Education in which the teaching of the principal language is free from lingocentric approaches, in which the teaching (in courses of language and culture) of a first (and a second, third...) foreign language and/or of a minority national language and/or of languages of migration is planned at an early stage. In this context of openness to exchange, the teaching of the local language to members of a linguistic minority can improve, by giving a positive value to the contributions that come from immersion. Opening up education to multilingualism and to the intercultural dimension implies not to repress, but rather to authorize, show the appreciation of and encourage the appreciation of other languages, give a positive value to the linguistic competence of the pupils, accustom them to linguistic comparison and to indicating the cultural differences and similarities that are shown in the languages.

Modern languages are a privileged, but not unique, area for development of a multilingual perspective and intercultural competence. Other disciplines must intervene as well and contribute to the inter-linguistic and multicultural dialogue. Individual schools, which today make many more autonomous decisions than before, can become environments of multilingual learning and offer experiences of integrated multilingual education. This prospect requires teachers who know how to act as intercultural operators, capable of educational teaching interaction in the network of relations that are formed through exchanges and partnerships among schools. In order to reach these objectives, continuing teacher training is necessary which gives instruments for establishing connections among languages, for defining comparability among different linguistic systems and for creating diversified linguistic curricula.

Teachers who are trained *ad hoc* are necessary, as well as adequate instruments, resource centres with multilingual dictionaries and multimedia encyclopaedias, specific software, and teaching materials that facilitate the knowledge of more than one language.

It is a necessary radical change towards an education with a European point of view that favours not only the uniformity of certification, but gives instruments for elaborating curricula for linguistic education in which multiple forms of knowledge and competence cutting across various fields combine, and the weight of so many unconnected disciplines is avoided. Any choice of multilingual education implies, nevertheless, a certain amount of alternating among the languages and requires modalities of modular programming in which two or more languages alternate. Multilingualism is a socio-psychological process, insomuch as it offers the opportunity to stimulate learning of a co-operative type and generates curiosity for linguistic discovery and motivation

to increase one's linguistic repertoire. It is above all a political choice, insomuch as it is a democratic value, a step towards real communication, at least at the European level. To communicate is a conscious social act, it is negotiation of meanings, and it constructs bridges of relationships and interchange.

The knowledge of several foreign languages is required nowadays for a better social interaction. This reinforces the social representation of the importance and the utility of those languages and contributes to reinforcing stereotypes of presumed greater or lesser difficulty in the learning of one language or another. A monolingual policy inevitably causes closed attitudes and misconceptions regarding the languages that are taught less. In order to answer the need for social cohesion and thus promote the democratic behaviour of an active citizenship, it is necessary to give differentiated opportunities in various languages, in all phases of life, to develop learning to learn, and activate a multilingual education that becomes a part of common knowledge and that educates people to value the linguistic and cultural heritage of Europe.

Experiencing the intercultural dimension represents an emerging competence. The intercultural dimension is connected to a conceptual framework that cannot be reduced to the simple realization that multiple cultures exist, endowed with distinctive natures and identifiable and comparable characteristics; it insists on the importance of the relationship among cultures and implies the reciprocal transformation that is generated from such a relationship, going beyond the ambiguities of the *multicultural* approach, in which the exaltation and the legitimization of the differences is translated into the hope of an uninvolved although respectful co-existence among cultures. In language learning this tendency marks the passage from a series of different traditional approaches, to a new multi-linguistic openness regarding the interactive co-existence among languages and cultures.

In Europe two processes today emphasize the emergence of a dilemma between choices and approaches between multiculturalism and interculturality, destined to have an influence on the models of relationship and communication that will prevail at a community level: on the one hand, we find the difficult path of European integration, on the other, the enlistment of Europe as a whole, but also of the Member States taken singly as actors in planetary competition, into the paths of globalization and the opening of markets. There are thus the forces that find their origin in economic development and in political directions based on liberty of movement and on closer and closer integration among markets; such forces create an ever more inescapable interweaving of relationships of countries, of economic and commercial operators, of workers and institutions. The organizations and the people must deal with socio-cultural contexts that are farther and farther apart. In order to remain in markets nowadays, it is necessary

to create relationships, to negotiate, to deal, both as single operators and as categories, reaching as far as the highest institutional levels, with partners who adopt codes of communication and relationships that are the expression of other cultures, and for this reason the relevance is growing of a learning how to relate, which integrates the linguistic dimension with intercultural competence.

Globalization means, on the other hand, the consolidation of inbound migratory flows into the European Union, as well as of movements within the Union. It is a matter, in this latter field, of tendencies that are broadly encouraged by the programmes of the Union themselves, but in the former case of phenomena which the political forces recognize as just as necessary and urgent, while at the same time an effort is being made to control them, although with little success. Once again the dimension of intercultural competence, which we could define as the ability of the individual to mobilize the cognitive, personal and relational resources necessary to establish a mutual relationship of exchange and understanding with a subject belonging to a different culture, takes on a central position for the economic and institutional actors. The forces in the direction of intercultural communication connected to the processes of European integration should be seen and considered in the same way. It is a question, of course, of a dialogue among persons and institutions that are culturally close, but in which the dimension of interculturality should not be trivialized, if we think of the differences, which can be profound, that exist in Europe among the declared values and representations of social structures and relations on the part of populations.

Globalization and European integration generate new proximities of relationships and create an obligation to choose directions for their management, which show a sort of oscillation of the pendulum between the multicultural perspective and intercultural approaches. But if we consider the relationship between the multi and inter-cultural dimension and linguistic competence, we must get used to reasoning in a complex way, as the indications of the European Union policies themselves suggest. The solidity of linguistic identities and the wealth of the *literacy* in people's mother tongues is in fact a key asset for advancement towards horizons of intercultural exchange. Such an asset, as is shown by the comparative studies promoted in the past few years on an international scale in order to verify the basic communicative competence of populations, today appears to be threatened by a certain standardization brought about by the media and by the diffusion of simplified codes of communications, and ends up as an obstacle to the dynamics of rich and conscious communication necessary in order to measure up to alteration.

With specific reference to language, the predominant idea thus seems to be that of multi-cultural and the defence of linguistic legitimacy, a starting point

from which interaction and reciprocal comprehension are possible. A multi-cultural policy, linked to the diffusion of the knowledge of multiple European Union languages, can be intended as an antidote to the conceptual poverty of a single .lingua franca. emptied of every cultural valence, and a defence of the dignity and survival of languages that are less used but are important in today's social evolutions.

The concept of a common European language, or .lingua franca., has been rejected: all European legislation, up to now, has been published in all the official languages of the Union. The first European cultural agreement, which dates back to 12 October 1954, encourages the study of the culture, the history and the language of the other European countries. Linguistic pluralism was the strategic orientation of educational policies of the European Commission. The *Strategy of Lisbon* lists the basic skills that cannot be renounced for every European citizen and sets the priorities to be realized by 2010, among which is the acquisition of linguistic and cultural competence, along the entire course of a lifetime.

The Council of Europe, in declaring 2001 the European year of languages, urged the Ministries of Education to promote the knowledge of multiple languages and the experience of multiple cultures. The various Plans of Action for linguistic and cultural development in Europe, not least among them the Communication of the EU Commission *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: Action Plan 2004-2006*, are also innovative forces and indicate educational perspectives for the advancement and the promotion of a plurality of languages and cultures on the European scene. Alongside the economic and, in a manner of speaking, structural forces that make intercultural competence an integral component of the communicative competence promoted by European policies, the comparison, that is getting closer and closer, is placed between values and cultures generated by migratory movements within and from outside the European Union. Above all, the migrations from outside the European Union make Europe a complex multi-cultural society, even beyond the multi-lingualism that already characterizes some of its components and geographic areas. The migratory flows, which answer a demand for work that is more and more within the area of services to people, today make needs for learning of local languages arise at a very early point with respect to what was once the case; in the same way, the work, because of its relational nature, leads to stimulating, more than in the past, the necessity for dialogue among people and cultures. Even temporary migrations in some way generate an early need for integration between the local population and foreigners, whereas in the situations in which one can observe a rapid maturing of the flows linked to uniting families, the intercultural encounter emerges in a striking way through the entry into schools of the children of the second generation, whose visibility is accentuated by the differences in birth rate of the original communities and those of immigration. Whereas up until a dozen years ago Italy was not a country with massive immigration, the growth of the

flows, motivated by internal economic changes, by social modifications, both internal and external, by humanitarian emergencies, by variations in the internal and continental work market, by influences involving politics and regarding the European institutional order has made the scenario in the present phase very different.

It seems indispensable, in a field of competitiveness and of competitive advantage to be maintained, to increase *understanding on a profound level, and thus free of distortions tied to intercultural dynamics*, between the two speakers. More and more factors of interaction emerge, which in the linguistic area alone, as a technical instrument, must also incorporate socio-cultural aspects that cannot be ignored in an economic sort of interculturality, such as the conversational norms that underlie and regulate not only conversation but the broader sphere of interactions point refers to education and training able to construct intercultural competence, not only by means of language but also through the ability to communicate, understand and share cultural patterns that are not one's own. The interest in this area is in fact widespread, as well as in relation to languages useful for economic contexts, and towards investments in linguistic and cultural education that can open paths to employment opportunities.

The social changes and those regarding the internationalization of markets and of economic spaces have generated a growing contact among different cultures, which calls for the activation of vectors that facilitate the encounter. These evolutions, which have been very rapid in the last 10-15 years, have shown the limits of the knowledge and skills traditionally transmitted by the schools, by now no longer sufficient and adequate to face both the everyday problems that each individual encounters and the social problems that involve the entire community.

The urgency has been recognized, although not yet precisely determined, to search out the necessary resources to deal with the new realities, allowing the states to promote an appropriate educational policy and the schools to be equal to the new tasks.

A survey with the selected subjects also shows the unavoidability of finding strategies for identifying valid theoretical and conceptual parameters, and, when possible, solid bases for the continuous development of reflection on the indispensable types of competence for individuals in the future intercultural context, in addition to points of reference for interpreting and defining the results desired from the realization of training and educational courses in the various countries. It seems necessary to contribute to broadening the reflections on such indicators, including types of competence that are not directly connected with productivity or competitiveness on an economic level, such as the

participation in civil society and personal accomplishments useful to realizing it, and other types of competence that could be encouraged also through other means, contexts and experiences that do not formally concern the course of schooling.

Although at the beginning there were a great variety of definitions and proposals, a broad consensus among the expert interviewed has emerged on at least two aspects:

a) there is a need for competence, meant as the ability to deal with a complex problem or carry out a complex activity, in the specific area of interculturality, with a valence that is not technical or determined by a specific discipline;

b) an intercultural communicative competence includes various components that can be summarized in the now classic triad of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

This competence is considered to be a potential resource of the individual and, as such, is manifested only when the situation requires it. There appears to be a consensus, not only on the intercultural relationship, with the appropriate instruments and principles, but also on the contextualization of intercultural competence, at least in theory, inasmuch as almost all the experts make it a constituent characteristic of the concept. At a first superficial glance, to assert that intercultural competence must be contextualized may seem to be a contradiction in terms, because if it must be an *inter* competence, it cannot go into the area of *intra*. And yet this is not true, in the sense that a competence regarding intercultural relationships, both in order to be acquired by the educator and to be grasped by the learner, must presuppose a basic flexibility capable of rendering each cultural context as perceptible as one's own, beyond the technical competence into which the intercultural competence can be inserted. In this sense contextualization is a decisive factor.

Learning a second language, that is, a linguistic whole different from one's mother tongue is a complex task, which implies the interiorization of more than one kind of competence and the acquisition of a new linguistic code, characterized by various levels: phonetic-phonological, morpho-syntactic, semantic-lexical, textual, pragmatic-communicative, and finally, social-functional 12. Communicating in L2 implies mastering a relationship, and being capable of penetration and deep understanding of the culture in which L2 is developed.

The theories of language learning have concentrated on the decisive factors that govern the acquisition of this complex relational competence, and the interpretative picture that emerges appears still to be fluid and far from finding a definitive organization. Whereas traditionally the *behaviourist* model, widely dominant in the 1950s, interpreted language acquisition as the assumption of linguistic habits and behaviours to be learned by means of imitation, repetition

and reinforcement, the fundamental advent of the *generative* model, introduced by Noam Chomsky precisely as a criticism towards the preceding model, greatly complicated the picture of the factors that dominate foreign language teaching, assuming language acquisition as emerging from a creative process founded on innate language ability. This theory is founded in its turn on *universal grammar*, which, according to Chomsky, is an innate individual linguistic ability that is based on certain general principles that underlie the specific grammar rules of every language.

The models developed in later phases followed the pathways of the complexity of factors evoked by Chomsky, accentuating each time the basic value of some decisive factors that favour the acquisition of a language, starting from the aptitude and inclination of the subject to produce learning in L2. The *environmental* theories have had the merit of paying attention primarily to the role of the environment and to psychological and social factors. The acquisition of a second language would thus be connected to processes of progressive adaptation to the culture of arrival and to its respective verbal expression. The *interactional and functional* model, by putting the interaction between environmental factors and mental-cognitive factors into the centre of attention, has set the weights among the factors that guide language learning back into balance, making learning depend on mental systems of elaboration of the language and on conditioning of a physiological sort, of articulation and of context, which have an effect on the use of language, with the use of *operative principles* which guide the elaboration of a language and its grammar.

Both these models implicitly assume that the intercultural dimension is relevant in language learning. But this is also assumed by a correct analysis of the result that we must expect from language learning, which is that one will learn to express oneself and communicate in L2 according to rules that belong to the new linguistic-cultural context of the learner. Thus, the learner is eventually able to adopt *a different categorization of reality or at least a different linguistic codification of some of its aspects*¹⁵, a process that clearly becomes much more complex as the structural and cultural distance of L2 with respect to the mother tongue increases.

Some theoretical paradigms should be kept in mind when one reconstructs relation between intercultural dimension and language learning. The privileged area of research for the elaboration of such paradigms has been, since the 1970s, the so-called *interlanguages*¹⁶, that is, the ways of communicating constructed by learners in the phase of acquisition of L2, which define the varieties of learning and the influence of the factors conditioning the learning itself. Theories of learning have thus been fashioned based on the relevance of the role that the

learner plays in the construction of his or her communicative competence, in interaction with the context.

The various theories place the accent on different aspects of the process of language learning, which from evidence obtained from the interviews with the selected subjects allow the assumption that each of the models listed previously has elements of application and of adaptability, according to the contexts, the linguistic peculiarity, the learners and the motivations of the learning. Language learning is thus, in this view, influenced by physical-environmental factors, socio-cultural factors, affective factors, neurological and cognitive factors and factors regarding the linguistic content. The socio-cultural one emphasizes the relevance for learning of the quality of the interaction that is generated between two groups, such as two people of different cultures. Affective factors also are important in the intercultural context, since the characteristics of the psychological and affective relationship between the group who learns the language and the local group are decisive for obtaining the result at the level of language plus culture.

With respect to a panorama of the theories of learning which is rich in stimuli and is in constant evolution, the models of language teaching today may be placed within an extremely diverse range of options and experimentation, which vary from the diffusion of limited forms of study of a second or even third language, perhaps contextualized to precise needs, to more incisive options, in which a multi-lingual environment is created, characterized by broader kinds of competence than only grammar and linguistic syntax. The language offer, in this case, involves the differentiation of the objectives of learning, and the acquisition of skills and partial competence with various degrees of mastery, with various functions, for different aims. Being multi-lingual does not necessarily mean mastering a high number of languages perfectly, but rather speaking other languages and succeeding in using and mastering gradually a variety of skills and various factors and being able to have at one's disposal a repertoire of communicative resources to be used in various ways, according to what is necessary.

One line of work traced by the Council of Europe and by the European Commission is integrated learning of language and contents. In this case, languages become the vehicle for studying some subjects in the curriculum, and are no longer .objects of study and only that. Another indication for research is regarding receptive learning of more than one language through the development of strategies that facilitate the transferability of cognitive processes, knowledge, and skills already acquired from one language to another, from the mother tongue to the first foreign language and from it to the second, and so on. The experiments carried out in some French, German and Scandinavian

universities showed the feasibility of the projects, until now considered utopian, aimed at multilingual reciprocal comprehension.

Erasmus and *Socrates* projects can optimize inter-comprehension to allow, gradually, most European citizens to express themselves in their own languages and to understand those of their interlocutors. It has been demonstrated that, in order to reach a reasonably good degree of reciprocal understanding, it is necessary to begin from a greater awareness of one's own strategies and styles of learning, from the realization of one's own cultural and affective attitudes. Linguistic and cultural comprehension is a dynamic process which, because of cognitive reinforcement, calls on the general skills of the person, recycles past knowledge and experience and exploits the person's lexical knowledge in order to transfer it to the new areas of learning. Inter-comprehension is, thus, transferability among different languages with cognitive instruments that go beyond those that are merely linguistic.

Inter-comprehension is certainly not the solution to the many problems of intercultural communication, but it is a prospect of an initial relational approach. Multi-language learning helps one to achieve consciousness of the various ways of relating in societies characterized by cultures tied to feelings of belonging. Thus, to communicate means in this sense to interact culturally, to be able to see one's own culture in relation to the culture of the countries of which one studies the languages, and implies the ability to go beyond stereotyped modalities of relating. Thus, in a multilingual profile there is the development of an intercultural competence that strengthens the ability to relate to others. A plurality of languages as a matter of fact leads to a plurality of visions, and commits one to the effort of decentralizing one's own point of view in order to have a dialogue with different systems of values and codes of behaviour.

Foreign language teaching today tends towards the experimentation of approaches that pay close attention to the complexity of factors that control the ability of an adult to learn an L2. It tends not to reduce this complexity or to embrace a single orthodox model, but rather to adopt different strategies, which are careful to place the learner in the centre of the construction of language competence, according to the lesson of the studies that have concentrated on the wealth and articulation of the inter-languages produced by students. Teaching goes back and forth between formal, less formal, and completely informal learning of an L2. The factors that underlie the dimension of intercultural competence as a constituent part of communicative competence in L2 have thus become part of the foreign language-teaching horizon. The same may be said, at least in the most attentive circles in the professional universe of language teaching, of the consideration of how important, within the process of the construction of competence, the affective factors are, which come from intrinsic

motivation and from opportunities for integration into the new cultural and linguistic context perceived by the learner.

Intercultural competence is an enormously popular concept nowadays, its content being discussed in a great variety of contexts. It is not possible to arrive at one particular definition of the concept - it is always contextually determined, coloured by the latest discourses on competence, culture, communication, language, etc. Some people even feel that the concept of intercultural competence is becoming so all-embracing that one could just as well stop using it altogether: an interculturally competent person is quite simply one who is capable of living as a world citizen in this multicultural, globalised world! Even though I believe that there is much that speaks in favour of such an attitude, I would not go that far here, but would rather look at a particular type of intercultural competence, namely that which the teacher of foreign and second languages needs to develop.

Language teachers focus in particular on the linguistic dimension of intercultural competence and the intercultural competence they develop is what one, more precisely, refers to as intercultural communicative competence - where 'communicative' normally means 'linguistic', even though the concept of communication is actually wider than that. It is important to emphasise, however, that possessing intercultural communicative competence does not only mean that one is even better at communicating linguistically than one was previously.

Intercultural competence is broader than the linguistic dimension, adding something else that is also important, something to do with content - a greater knowledge of the world.

Developing one's intercultural competence is an aspect of the lifelong socialisation process, or - to express it in more constructivist terms - a lifelong project. From early childhood and throughout our lives, we learn more and more about dealing with social and cultural differences and relating to them in developing our own identity. When we are involved in formal learning of a foreign or second language - at school or during teacher education - there is special focus on a particular kind of cultural differences, namely the national or the ethnic. We focus to a great extent on a national language, e.g. French, and on how life can be lived in France or in other French-speaking countries. We can be more or less aware of cultural, ethnic and linguistic variation - and of international and transnational relationships - but the national or nation-state framework normally asserts itself at some level or other - at least when it comes to language teaching in Europe.

It is important to stress that intercultural competence should not simply be perceived as 'bicultural'. All present-day societies are culturally complex at many levels, as a result of cultural developments and processes of dispersal over most of the world. Nation states attempt, generally speaking, to maintain an awareness of a common national culture and identity, though, in fact, cultural complexity reigns - a complexity that is characterised by the power structures

that exist in the societies concerned and in the world. Intercultural competence is the ability to handle - productively and receptively - this cultural complexity in the micro-context and the macro-context: in the residential area, the burger bar, at home in front of the TV, out shopping, at the workplace, on the Internet, at the international seminar, etc. as well as at more general level in the multicultural and globalised world.

Intercultural competence is an active and productive ability, for, in actually using it, we create culture, i.a. in the classroom. In communicating, we create or confirm our identities, and understanding is an active process where one creates an understanding of what has been said from one's own perspective and own horizon. I think that it is productive to have such a social-constructivist approach to intercultural communicative competence. On the other hand, one must not forget that this liberty to create our own identities soon runs up against fairly solid systems that identify us against our will. Liberty encounters coercion.

The affective dimension is something I see as being the primary dimension, in the sense that its development stems from the first years of life. It has to do with the basic trust one has in the world and in other people, with one's self-image and self-respect. This is the most important prerequisite for curiosity, openness and a willingness to reject false assumptions, as Byram i.a. emphasises as characterising intercultural competence. There is a strong need for psychodynamic studies of intercultural competence, including the linguistic dimension. What happens mentally when one uses a foreign language? Does one feel elated or insecure? There is also a question of identity linked to this: What does it mean to be able to use another language than one's native language? Is it nice, even a relief, to 'assume' another identity as a user of that language, or is it connected with unpleasant experiences and fear? What role does the linguistic perfection requirement play in how one sees oneself? These questions, naturally, exert a great influence on one's function as a language teacher.

The behavioural dimension consists, first and foremost, of one's experience in using the foreign language in various situations and various domains: at school or during education and training, in the workplace, at home, etc., no matter whether it is in one's own country or in the target language country. In addition, it consists in a number of other forms of behaviour, some of which run parallel with language practice (body language and the way one uses space when communicating) and others which are relatively independent of the course of language practice (clothing and other signs on the body). Once again, one can stress that behaviour is not something one simply learns: What is it that makes it difficult for some to learn unfamiliar forms of body language, while others happily plunge in at the deep end? This, too, can be a considerable challenge for a teacher, who, after all, is exposed to the class for most of the time.

The cognitive dimension comprises knowledge about and insight into the world, with a certain focus on the countries where the language is spoken as a native-language. It is important to emphasise here that knowledge is always a

matter of perspective - linked closely to our 'position' in the world: where we come from geographically, socially and historically, our gender, etc. Our knowledge is formed by our family background, our schooling, the media, travel, etc. Certain areas of our knowledge are relatively objective in nature, e.g. factual knowledge about the number of parties in a country, but otherwise our knowledge is linked to our personal experiences, varying from one person to the next. Are we as language teachers aware of the perspective from which we view the world?

The development of intercultural competence ought to lead to a critical cultural awareness and a political awareness of oneself as a citizen. I would add that it ought to lead to a political awareness of oneself as a citizen of the world. This is because I feel that language teachers, by virtue of their experiences with various languages and various language areas have special opportunities to contribute to developing the global vision and involvement of their students or participants.

Kramsch says that when one develops one's intercultural competence, one develops 'a third place', i.e. one creates a special personal linguistic and cultural identity that is new and completely one's own. One does naturally not become a native speaker of the foreign language; one develops into something else, something which Byram calls an intercultural speaker, i.e. a person who can take in and mediate between various cultural contexts, also in terms of language: interpret, translate, clear up misunderstandings and so on.

The teacher ought to be able to describe and assess his or her own intercultural competence. For that reason, I would suggest that teachers and student teachers work with their own linguistic and cultural biography.

In the teaching situation, one can distinguish between two different ways in which the teacher can use his or her intercultural competence:

On the one hand, the teacher can develop personal knowledge of the world and the use of language as a tool in language teaching and communicate with various students, and they can differ because of having different ethnic and social backgrounds. We are dealing here with dyadic relationships, i.e. relationships between two parties: the teacher and a student or group of students. One could refer to it as the 'I-you axis' in intercultural communication. It has to do with how 'I' am able to communicate with another person or another group of persons. It has to do with my own attitudes to the others, my own personality, my own self-development, my own intercultural learning, and/or my own lack of intercultural competence.

On the other hand, the teacher develops a mediating competence, for the student group consists of different people. The teacher learns how to make these different people relate to each other, to communicate and to cooperate and to go beyond cultural differences.

So the teacher constantly has to try and exploit cultural differences in a positive way, intervening and mediating at all times. How do the students

perceive each other and each other's language knowledge? Which of them are good at cooperating and supplementing each other? How can the teacher help the students by taking about disagreements? The focus is more on the social and cultural complexity in the outside world and it has to relate to the various groups' identities and ideas about each other. It focuses on the others' intercultural competence. The teacher has to make use of it when it is necessary to create good conditions for each of the students to be able to develop competence by interaction.

The central topic of language and culture pedagogy is the way in which we can we organise teaching in the best way possible, so that the students can develop their communicative and intercultural competence. There are, no doubt, many teachers who reflect on their own practice and the intercultural competence it provides or does not provide. But it is not an integral part of the common debate among those teaching languages. An issue that also calls out for greater clarification is the cultural diversity of the language subjects. The various languages play completely different roles at a global level. The cultural and societal contexts that are relevant for the various languages are also completely different. Like it or not, language teaching is to a certain extent bound up with the idea of the nation, not least in Europe. So the language teacher's competence will be able to contain an interesting element: Awareness of what is referred to as *banal nationalism*. The expression *banal nationalism* comes from the British social psychologist Michael Billig. It is an ideology that maintains or legitimises the nation state. It finds expression in the many small everyday things and statements which remind us that the world is divided into nation states and which presuppose that this is common sense, something which is quite natural and which could not be otherwise. It is an ideology, and, what is more, the most successful ideology in the history of mankind, for the belief that the whole world must of necessity be divided into nation states with precise borders is now universal. It is important to stress that intercultural competence does not simply have to do with dealing with national differences but that is also means dealing with the actual cultural complexity that has arisen as a result of transnational and global processes.

In order to develop intercultural competence one has to meet and understand someone who differs from oneself. Diversity, cooperation and mutual appreciation are all prerequisites for and values in intercultural competence, in general.

But traditionally, intercultural communication as a field of research has as its point of departure communication between two or more people who, culturally speaking, are very different, who do not know all that much about each other and who therefore misunderstand each other - often, however, in a way that is predictable if one takes the respective cultural backgrounds of the communication partners into consideration. Today, it is meaningless to consider the individual as culturally unambiguous and behaviourally predictable. The

way in which the individual navigates in a culturally, ethnically and socially complex society gives rise to many different types of knowledge and attitudes. Despite this, conflicts and difficulties in communication are still seen that can be explained by the cultural diversity of the participants. This means that interculturally oriented research must also deal with how linguistic and intercultural learning processes can be initiated and maintained. Within traditional research into intercultural communication, one is also aware of the fact that the individual must learn and develop in order to be better able to take part in intercultural encounters. The overall strategies that can be recommended to promote learning and developmental processes can be described as: the dissemination of knowledge and training aimed at modifying behaviour.

The choice of dissemination of knowledge as a method is based on the idea that intercultural communication is made more difficult because of erroneous preconceptions that those communicating have of each other. Stereotype assumptions, understood as the way in which knowledge about 'others' is organised cognitively, can be useful structuring tools, but are often the expression of simplified assumptions that can be fleshed out via enhanced knowledge.

In connection with intercultural learning, research into intercultural communication has mainly been interested in defining learning content and thereby answering a question such as: *What is to be learned?* There has also been interest in developing best teaching and training methods, which once more reflects the emphasis on practice in considerable sections of the literature on the subject. On the other hand, there has been relatively limited interest in detailed exploration of the learning processes that take place - either in the cultural encounter in practice or in relation to formal teaching sequences. This focus on content and teaching method does not harmonise with the strong emphasis on the learner and the learning process which is otherwise typical of modern pedagogical research.

The assumption that intercultural learning can take place as an unproblematic increase of the learner's existing knowledge, which is then converted into competent action is unable to find support from modern learning theoreticians. Mezirow, for instance, distinguishes between a more instrumental, superficial learning and in-depth learning, which involves fundamental revision of structures and modes of thought. For Mezirow the in-depth level also involves critical, reflective thought.

Such a distinction between learning at various levels is characteristic of modern learning theoreticians, even though the levels are given other names by other theoreticians and are not defined in precisely the same way. There is, however, general agreement that instrumentally oriented learning that seeks to correct spontaneously occurring errors and inappropriate reactions represents a low or introductory level of learning. The learning aimed for in traditional intercultural communication theory must be included among this type.

There is much to indicate that the conception of learning in traditional intercultural communication research will be insufficient to bring about an understanding of the learning that is linked to cultural exchange processes in modern, culturally heterogeneous societies. Not least when it comes to adult learners, an understanding of learning must be able to describe that all the most significant learning takes place as a revision of existing knowledge and patterns of thought. That intercultural learning (like all other learning) is dependent on what the learner already knows, thinks and believes is in fact more consistently included in interculturally oriented foreign language methodology than in intercultural communication research. For example, the concept the intercultural speaker was introduced precisely in recognition of the fact that what the foreign language learner acquires and the learning processes through which he or she passes are basically different from the corresponding processes in a native speaker. The foreign language learner is, after all, also influenced by the socio-cultural contexts through which he or she has passed up until that point. So significant learning in relation to a new linguistic and cultural context will also become a process that involves consciousness-raising, new awareness and thereby revision of existing conceptions.

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