Practices in Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning

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Edited by

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and Catherine Elizabeth Riley

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INTRODUCTION

What is intercultural language teaching and learning?

Intercultural language teaching and learning is hardly a new concept. Although not always expressed using this specific term, there have always been both a cultural and an intercultural dimension to language teaching and learning (see Kramsch, 1996). In the 21st Century, however, this dimension has come to the fore of the language teaching profession, in both theory and praxis, due to globalization, mass migration, and advances in telecommunications and internet communication technologies.

As the world has grown ever more mobile, interconnected, and seemingly smaller, and with the rise of multilingual and multicultural societies (or in most cases merely a growing awareness of their existence), the aim of language education has transformed:

I. From teaching speakers of the "same" first language and from the "same" cultural background how to communicate, from time to time (e.g., during study abroad, vacations, or business trips), with an idealized native speaker of a foreign language who fits a perceived national cultural mold;

II. To teaching speakers of a few first languages and from a few different cultural backgrounds how to *integrate into*—or *assimilate to*—the national culture of an idealized native speaker of a second language;

III. To teaching multilingual speakers of a multitude of first, second, and foreign languages, who claim multiple cultural identities—with no desire to conform to only one language or identity—how to use an additional language, often as a lingua franca, in their everyday interactions with native speakers of *any* language and from *any* cultural background (see Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011).

This transformation in the scope and aims of language education clearly necessitates the adoption of an intercultural approach to teaching and learning. Before proceeding, we must define what that means.

Within the tradition of continental *intercultural education*, Portera (2011) identifies a relevant distinction between *multi*cultural, *trans*cultural,

and *inter*cultural approaches, as applied to general education. The prefix "multi", according to Portera, means "many", and thus implies that numerous cultures are living and learning side-by-side in the pursuit of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence, yet without necessarily coming into regular or meaningful contact with one another. *Multicultural education* accepts that there are profound cultural differences between groups of people, but adopts the perspective of *cultural relativism* (sometimes *moral relativism*), that is until there is some major miscommunication or conflict. The prefix "trans" implies motion across a perceived boundary, but that motion is the one-directional application of one cultural framework to another. *Transcultural education* presumes *cultural universalism*, or the notion that all citizens of the world have the same fundamental wants and needs and should have the same fundamental human rights, though those wants, needs, and rights are, in reality, imposed by a *dominant culture* and are often rejected as a hegemonic practice. Without entirely negating the merits of these two "poles", the prefix "inter", implies a connection, a reciprocal relationship, whereby cultures are not only peacefully coexisting and not only coming into contact on the basis of shared beliefs and values, that not only is some cultural transformation occurring, but that communication, a negotiation of meaning and an exchange of ideas, is occurring. *Intercultural education* requires neither the absence of misunderstanding and conflict nor the unconditional acceptance of and conformity to beliefs and behaviors which one finds morally objectionable. It only requires mutual respect and a mutual willingness to exchange ideas and learn from one another. From this perspective, the contemporary learner must acquire multiple *intercultural competencies* in order to simultaneously manage and learn from all intercultural encounters (Portera, 2011).

Such a view of the purpose of intercultural education aligns with definitions of the *global citizen* such as that of Oxfam (2006), which describes a global citizen as someone who:

- Is aware of the wider world and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen;
- Respects and values diversity;
- Has an understanding of how the world works;
- Is passionately committed to social justice;
- Participates in the community at a range of levels, from the local to the global;
- Works with others to make the world a more equitable and sustainable place; and

- Takes responsibility for their actions.

As regards "intercultural language teaching and learning" more specifically, perhaps the most succinct definition of the term to-date is provided by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), who define it not as a methodology or an approach to teaching and learning languages, but rather as a broad "intercultural perspective" from which languages are taught and learned.

> We understand intercultural language teaching and learning as an *intercultural perspective*, that is, as the self-awareness of the language teacher as a participant in linguistic and cultural diversity; it is therefore not simply a way of teaching, but a way of understanding lived experiences of language and culture as the framing for teaching. For us, an intercultural perspective can be understood as the lens through which the nature, purpose, and activity of language teaching and learning are viewed, and the focus which students develop through their language learning. The intercultural in language learning is then a way of viewing the nature of language, culture, and learning as they come together in the acquisition of a new language. The starting point for such a perspective is the view that language learning is fundamentally engagement in intercultural communication and that the addition of a new language to a person's linguistic repertoire positions that person differently in relation to the world in which they live. Language learning from an intercultural perspective is therefore an exploration of the intercultural, used as a lens for understanding language teaching and learning as both theory and practice. (p. 14)

Language teaching in general, they argue, "cannot be reduced to methodological prescriptions" as it is an inherently "ecological activity" which draws upon diverse methods by means of "dialogic relationships between theory and practice, between teaching and learning, and between teacher and student" (p. 15). Teachers and students, and arguably all stakeholders in language education, must negotiate their own approaches, models, and methods of teaching and learning languages from an intercultural perspective. Another way to express this idea might be that intercultural language teaching is merely the natural outcome of interculturally competent language teachers responding to multicultural learning environments, multicultural communities, and a multicultural world in desperate need of interculturally competent, multilingual communicators. Simply put, intercultural language teaching and learning is what must occur in our globalized world if we aim to train and educate the global citizens of the future.

This edited volume has been written and published with these and other viewpoints in mind: that the aim of intercultural language teaching and learning is to foster effective communication and effective learning in spaces between cultures in order to prepare learners for global citizenship and that the corresponding models and methods must emerge from the bottom-up in order to meet the needs of each unique learning context.

Some background

Most of the chapters published in this book were presented at the Seminar on Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning, which was hosted at the University Language Centre at the University of Trento on 21 November 2015. The seminar was organized by the TESOL Italy Val d'Adige Local Group in collaboration with the School for International Studies at the University of Trento, The International Centre for Intercultural Exchange in Siena, and the Centre for Intercultural Studies at the University of Verona. The stated aim of the seminar was to explore 1) theories of intercultural language teaching and learning, 2) current approaches to intercultural language teaching, 3) the implications of language learning in intercultural contexts, and 4) practical methods and tools for teaching intercultural competence as well as managing intercultural communication in the foreign language classroom, all of which as developed and/or applied in specific learning contexts. This book addresses these same issues from various perspectives, albeit not always directly and not always centrally.

Major impetuses for the seminar were: the phenomenon that had recently been denoted by politicians and the media as the "European migrant crisis" (or "European refugee crisis"); the series of terrorist attacks in Paris from 7 to 9 January 2015; and the resulting anxiety and xenophobia seen across Europe in reaction to these events, especially the perceived crisis in education. The attack in Paris on 15 November, which claimed 137 lives and caused an additional 368 injuries, was very fresh in the minds of the speakers and participants. While no one in attendance claimed that language teachers or interculturalists could solve such problems alone, all shared the common belief that more intercultural education was needed and that intercultural language teaching and learning are central to intercultural education.

As this introduction is being written, the situation has not improved. There have been major terrorist attacks in Brussels, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Populist and right-wing politicians and political parties have won or come close to winning major national elections. The

United Kingdom is in the process of exiting the European Union and Donald Trump was elected president, in both cases in large part due to anti-globalization and xenophobic sentiments and concerns over national security amongst the electorate. If social media and the news media are any indication, the political Left and the political Right—though they share many of the same fundamental anxieties—no longer seem capable of communicating with one another, let alone finding the common ground necessary to govern postmodern nations. In short, the world seems to be at a tipping point where globalization and internationalization must be fully embraced, drastically reformed, or fully abandoned. Assuming that the third path is an impossibility, as experts in most fields of inquiry do, the need for intercultural language teaching and learning is now greater than ever. However small this contribution may be, we embrace the goal of fostering effective intercultural communication and mutual understanding and acceptance as prerequisites for a safer and more equitable world.

Themes and structure

When it was decided to publish the perspectives from the seminar in an edited volume, it was initially planned to structure the book into two parts, with the first describing "programs and models" and the second outlining "approaches, methods, and classroom practices". As the manuscripts were submitted and the book began to take form, it became evident that it would be impossible to compartmentalize the ideas and experiences of the contributors so neatly. Each chapter in fact relates various classroom or field experiences to overlapping frameworks, and there are numerous common threads linking the chapters, including:

a) The importance of culture and intercultural learning in language education;
b) Definitions of culture;
c) The combination of culture specific and culture general teaching and learning and a non-essentialist approach to culture;
d) Connections between culture, intercultural competence, language, and intercultural communication;
e) Definitions of intercultural competence;
f) The various intercultural competencies required for intercultural communication;
g) Integrated approaches to language and culture learning;
h) The application of developmental models of intercultural competence as well as the limitations of such models;

i) The role of reflection, critical thinking, and destablization in intercultural learning;
j) The need for intercultural competence in learning and using English as a lingua franca (ELF);
k) A discussion of values, beliefs, and stereotypes as a crucial step in becoming interculturally competent;
l) The use of critical incidents to discuss cultural differences;
m) Structured approaches to developing intercultural competence during study abroad and online exchange.

As multiple combinations of these thematic strands characterize each chapter, the book has ultimately not been divided into sections; instead chapters have been ordered logically according to how the content of each chapter might frame the content of subsequent chapters. We feel that the book reads quite naturally in its final structure.

The chapters

Rudi Camerer and Judith Mader begin by outlining their approach to intercultural training with the point of departure being that culture is a "dynamic", "fluid", and unquantifiable phenomenon which is "inextricably" connected to language and communication, while intercultural competence can only be measured in terms of one's "communicative performance" within specific intercultural contexts. In light of this, they believe intercultural training should not focus on developing cognitive stages or particular personality traits, per se, but rather on developing "the interculturally appropriate use of language" as "a central aim of every intercultural training concept, rather than… as a desirable extra." Their approach emphasizes the role of ELF in most intercultural encounters, especially in business, and relies on the application of discourse and text analysis to the discussion of *critical incidents*—that is, examples of misunderstandings and failures in intercultural communication. They offer three examples of the use of such critical incidents in their training programs, one regarding trust-building, one involving discourse strategies, and one involving issues of gender.

Sabine Kroneder—whose perspective on culture, intercultural competence, and ELF aligns with that of Camerer and Mader—outlines her own ELF approach to intercultural learning. She begins by reflecting upon how—despite the "native speaker" and "target culture" biases apparent in both the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the English language curricula for secondary schools in Austria—

there is ample room for an ELF approach in Austrian secondary education, namely because most encounters contemporary students will have with English outside the classroom predominantly involve ELF. Kroneder views ELF as "by definition, intercultural in its nature". Unlike the English as a foreign language (EFL) approach, an ELF approach enables learners to maintain and express their cultural identities by adopting *culture general* teaching methods that develop the learners' "cultural self-awareness" including their "awareness of other diversity dimensions, such as gender, religion, professional background, [and] educational background." She concludes by demonstrating three example activities: one for the development of cultural self-awareness, one for exposing learners to authentic samples of ELF in use, and one for the revelation of the verbal and nonverbal aspects of intercultural communication.

With the semantic clarifications and the case for intercultural learning in language education established in the previous chapters, Peter Anderson and Patrick Boylan situate their workshop on stereotypes within the tradition of constructivist pedagogy. The workshop, which adapts four exercises taken from Cambridge University Press's *Intercultural Resource Pack* and a fifth exercise involving the self-measurement of intercultural sensitivity beyond the workshop using Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), first aims to "get learners to make better sense of what they know, or rather what they think they know" and to "then [call] those beliefs into question." Using this methodology across five activities, the learners: 1) define the term "stereotype"; 2) are exposed to and discuss the most common national stereotypes in Europe, including common stereotypes of their own nationality as a destabilizing device; 3) reflect upon and learn to adopt a critical perspective towards their own stereotyping of others; 4) experience how stereotypes, even when supported by empirical evidence, are always overgeneralizations; and 5) learn to use the DMIS to self-measure their intercultural sensitivity as they engage in lifelong intercultural learning.

Working within the same discursive field of the interculturalist, Ana Beaven shifts the discussion to intercultural learning within university student mobility programs by presenting a pilot study of the integration of the Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers (IEREST) in a short EFL course designed specifically for students planning to study abroad. In addition to learning the language of their host country, Beaven argues that mobile students require "explicit intercultural preparation" because "contact with cultural others is not sufficient to develop intercultural sensitivity". The integration of such preparation in a language course is a natural fit because the focus of

foreign language teaching in general has shifted "from learning about a target culture to acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to be an interculturally-competent speaker." The IEREST adopts Adrian Holliday's *non-essentialist* approach to culture, in that learners must be made aware of *small cultures* "defined in terms of social class, religious beliefs, professional practices, gender, and sexual orientation, or simply common interests" and how all cultural identities are socially constructed from context to context. Beaven presents the use of the activity "Meeting Others Abroad", which "encourage[s] students to reflect on what it means to engage with others while abroad", before offering some empirical evidence of the effectiveness of this activity within the EFL course.

Where Beaven offers an example of how to prepare exchange students to engage in intercultural learning and develop some intercultural competence prior to their departure, Jules Martin Bella Owona presents a customized model for assessing the development of intercultural competence once students are immersed in the foreign language and culture. Specifically, he describes how the Reflective Intercultural Competence Assessment Rubrics were developed within the Siena Italian Studies exchange program—a program which combines the methods of full immersion, classroom instruction, and service learning—organized by the The International Center for Intercultural Exchange in Siena, Italy. A central learning experience within the exchange program is a *Reflective Writing* course, which "provides students the means to explore, gradually understand, and deeply absorb the host culture through permanent observation, comparison, and reflection." The rubrics are fully grounded in the exchange program in that they emerged from a qualitative analysis of student journals prepared within the context of the *Reflective Writing* course. This process led to the observation of a specific type of intercultural competence, *reflective intercultural competence*, which the rubrics measure on a seven-phase developmental scale. Owona demonstrates each phase in the scale with excerpts from student journals.

Francesca Helm describes a different variety of intercultural exchange. Specifically she describes two models of *online intercultural exchange* (OIE), or *telecollaboration*: the *bilingual, bicultural* model, and the *lingua franca, facilitated dialogue* model. Although many stakeholders in language education may view OIE as a "poor substitute" for traditional foreign exchange, Helm notes that OIE is increasingly being recognized as a form of "authentic, experiential learning" in its own right "through which learners engage with other learners in online environments through specifically designed tasks which foster the development of… 21st century skills." This acceptance is in response to the "dramatic increase in online

communications in recent decades and the implication of this is that students need to acquire foreign language skills, intercultural communicative competence, and digital and participatory literacies." The older *bilingual, bicultural* model uses eTandems to pair non-native speaker learners with native speakers of the target language or online resources to expose learners to the differences of the target culture, and thus suffers from the same biases mentioned by other contributors in that it assumes "static" and "essentialist" "idealizations of homogenous communities" and can only be successful under the guidance of a teacher who promotes reflexivity to challenge this misconception. The *lingua franca, facilitated dialogue* model, on the other hand, links hundreds of students—most of whom non-native speakers of English—from partner universities all over the world in a "dialogue process" "to explore views and feelings" on "sensitive and controversial issues" under the guidance of an external trained facilitator within a "safe space." However, due to the cost of coordination this experience must be outsourced and externally funded.

The final chapter by Michael Joseph Ennis coincidentally, but conveniently, begins with a brief overview of the emergence of a postmodern and poststructuralist definition of culture and the resulting approaches to integrating this more complex definition in language teaching and learning. He lists the most common integrated teaching methods, including all of the aforementioned, but he does so in order to highlight how in many EFL contexts there are simply not enough resources—especially limited instructional hours and the limited cognitive resources of the students—to actually apply these methods. This is especially true in a recent teaching context where he only had 30 hours of instruction to teach English for specific academic purposes to university students who complete 50% of their curriculum using English as a medium of instruction. In order to ensure that his students engage in "any cultural and intercultural learning at all," he must "fully integrate" language and culture and adopt a "deceptively subtle integrated approach." "In other words, cultural and intercultural learning must be embedded in traditional language learning tasks conducted primarily in the target language." To do this, he relies on an integrated model which aligns the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) language proficiency guidelines to Bennet's DMIS, as "a flexible set of guidelines for integrating language and culture in individual tasks, lessons, syllabi, and curricula." He concludes with a sample lesson which challenges his students to appropriate, "at least temporarily" the values, beliefs, and language of a cultural other.

Limitations and applications

Although this volume will certainly confront the reader with new ideas, it does not purport to be a watershed contribution to the field of intercultural language teaching and learning. Nor is it conceived as an introductory reader, even if it is saturated with key concepts and terms and even though it offers diverse perspectives. Instead, this book is a collection of experiences rooted in praxis. It shares the decidedly "ecological" activities, methods, models, and approaches which have emerged from "dialogic relationships between theory and practice, between teaching and learning, and between teacher and student." No chapter should be read as a universal prescription for success, as each chapter only presents the best practices which have emerged within a unique context of teaching and learning. It should be viewed more as an example of how to adopt an "intercultural perspective" in teaching and learning than how to teach and learn interculturally. Having said that, the editors and contributors share the conviction that our experiences can be informative to the realities of all readers in the same way that our practices have been informed by others before us.

There are two obvious limitations to this book. The first is its near exclusive emphasis on the English language. The fact that it is written entirely in English is of course justified by the fact that the discourse on intercultural studies is, for good or ill, English-dominated. But the fact that only one chapter directly deals with a language other than English—Bella Owona's chapter about intercultural exchange for learners of Italian—and only one indirectly deals with another language—Ennis's personal model was originally developed while teaching German—leaves an unfortunate gap in perspectives.

The second limitation is that it exclusively shares experiences teaching young adults: upper secondary schools, private language schools, and, especially, universities. Both language education and intercultural education begin at a young age, and learning at lower levels of education of course serve as a foundation for learning at higher levels of education. It is therefore regrettable that no speakers from primary and lower secondary schools were located for the seminar in 2015 and no contributions from such contexts are included in this book.

We can only hope that this book will inspire colleagues working with other languages and working in other educational contexts to share their perspectives in other venues in our mutual pursuit of preparing our learners for their complex lives in our contemporary world.

Michael Joseph Ennis and Catherine Elizabeth Riley
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LIMITS OF LEARNING?
TRAINING IN GENDER ISSUES, SELF-DISCLOSURE, AND CORRESPONDENCE IN INTERCULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

This chapter argues in favour of a training concept "which focuses less on broad constructs like 'culture' and more on the everyday concrete actions through which culture is produced" (R. Scollon, S. Scollon, & Jones, 2012, p. XVIII). Today, there are a great number of socio-linguistic studies available which provide empirical evidence of how cultural identities have been constructed through communication and interaction in a variety of contexts. Based on these, practical ways of achieving intercultural competence through training are suggested. For this purpose, three cases used in training courses have been chosen to address the specific issues of written correspondence, self-disclosure, and gender roles. The discussion of these pays particular attention to practical communication in English and addresses the potentials and limitations of intercultural training concepts in general.

Keywords: Intercultural Competence; International English; English as a Lingua Franca; Discourse Strategies; Politeness Conventions; Training Concepts; Gender; Self-Disclosure; Correspondence

Outlining the approach

In 1952 two American anthropologists compiled a list of 164 different definitions of "culture" (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). Unsurprisingly, there is great diversity in approaches in the intercultural field still today, and classification, perhaps simplification, is necessary in any description or analysis of approaches. With this in mind, we will begin by identifying two general strands manifested in training concepts for intercultural competence. These have been prevalent for many years and should be briefly characterised before introducing a third approach.

The first type of training concept is based on largely cognitive approaches and has been in use since the early 1980's. Drawing mainly on quantitative culture frameworks provided by Geert Hofstede, Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, Shalom Schwartz, the GLOBE Study, and others, these training programmes aim to sensitise participants to deeper layers of cultures and values (their own and others') and prepare them for unexpected and unusual behaviour. Findings of quantitative frameworks have been highly influential in the training sector and may have some justification as they may sensitise participants to cultural diversity where it is perhaps least expected (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009; Ward Bochner & Furnham, 2001) Nevertheless, we share the doubts of others concerning the underlying concept of "national cultures" manifest in the lists of nations on scales of psychological constructs like *uncertainty avoidance*, *assertiveness*, or *mastery*. We cannot accept the proposition that "the culture" of multi-ethnic nations (e.g., Switzerland, China, Spain, India, Hungary, USA, Brazil—in fact, which nation is not multi-ethnic?) can or should be presented using statistical mean measures. We do not see how the knowledge of a country's position on a scale of this sort can contribute significantly to one's preparation for effective communication with people from the country. Nor do we see how statistics collected from responses of corporate staff to self-answer questionnaires can be extrapolated to make statements about "national cultures" (Haas, 2007, 2009). We prefer the view that nation states are dynamic systems of numerous macro-, sub-, and micro-cultures, partially overlapping with other cultures and in a constant process of creation and re-creation through the everyday communication and interaction of large groups of individuals. In view of its dynamic and fluid character and its inextricable connection with language, it is this notion of culture which seems most plausible (Street, 1991; Witte, 2011, p. 89-107). Even the authors of quantitative frameworks concede that "real people" may differ from the analysis provided by statistics (e.g. Hofstede,

2005, p. 21). Yet these findings have been perceived and used in many cases to provide stereotypical images connected to psychological constructs of questionable validity (Behrens, 2007; Camerer & Mader, 2011; Haas, 2007; Haas, 2009; Taras-Steel, 2009; Dreyer, 2011; Verluyten, 2010, p. 180-200). To illustrate our point it may suffice to mention a critical commentary published by the *Harvard Business Review* in 2010 which contrasted three "China Myths" (collectivism, long-term deliberation, and risk aversion) with "China Facts" (individualism, real-time reaction, and risk tolerance) as attested by experienced business people in interviews (Meyer & Yi Shen, 2010).

Personality or performance?

The second group of training concepts focuses on aspects of personality and their development in training. Such concepts draw on a variety of theoretical frameworks such as humanistic psychology, neuro-linguistic programming, or Zen Buddhist traditions (Camerer, 2014; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

The key concepts which have dominated the training market in periodic waves have used terms such as *sensitivity*, *empathy*, *emotional intelligence*, *resilience*, *polycentrism*, and *mindfulness*. It is worth mentioning that all of these terms lack clear definitions and only enjoy to an extremely limited extent the support of relevant sectors of the scientific community (Friedman & Schustack, 2001; Pervin, 2003; D. Schultz & S. Schultz, 2005; Crowne, 2007; Omoniyi & White, 2006).

Nevertheless, some of the communication strategies suggested in this context are general indicators of effective communication and we subscribe to the emphasis given to relationship building and the importance of trust (Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2000). Developing self-awareness and the ability to question one's first conclusions are of utmost importance for effective intercultural communication (Byram, 1997). It is a matter of concern, however, whether the underlying concept of "personality" does not divert the focus away from what really counts, that is, practical communication. The notion that an individual's "personality" is an indicator of that same person's communicative performance in intercultural encounters ignores the widespread criticism of personality theory found in scholarly literature over the last fifty years (Omoniyi & White, 2006). And to view an individual's personality as belonging to him/her in a similar way as parts of the body implies taking lesser-known schools of personality theory for granted as self-evident theoretical constructs. No mention is made of the great many differing approaches

which, for example, focus on processes of personality development and its underlying factors. Six points summarised by Omoniyi and White (2006, p. 2) are shared by many contributors to personality theory:

1) Personal identity is not fixed;
2) Personal identity is constructed within established contexts and may vary from one context to another;
3) Contexts are moderated and defined by intervening social variables and are expressed through language;
4) Personal identity is salient in every communicative context;
5) Personal identity informs social relationships and also the communicative exchanges that characterize them; and
6) More than one identity may be articulated in a given context, in which case the management of identities will be dynamic.

Some of the strategies based on an essentially static concept of personality seem to re-enact communication strategies typical for therapeutic contexts. It seems questionable, for example, whether the proactive use of *active listening*, *mirroring*, or similar methods may be appropriate in intercultural encounters or whether the naïve application of such patterns might not even damage relationships. This is particularly critical in corporate environments, where hierarchy and power differences may be crucial for communication. In fact, suggestions like "don't impose", "give options", "be friendly", "assume your partner is dominant", "don't go on record", "be supportive", and so on may not be helpful (to say the least) in a great number of intercultural encounters. "The reason for this is that people from different cultures often have not only different ideas about what counts as language, but also different ideas about what counts as imposing, options, friendliness, dominance, supportiveness, and other key concepts…" (Janney & Arndt, 2005). It may seem ironic, but in spite of the fact that so much intercultural communication is conducted in English today, some widely used Anglo-American coaching and training concepts may be ethnocentric and un-helpful in many intercultural encounters.

So where does this leave us? It should be clear that we do not subscribe to essentially cognitive approaches (particularly not if they connect to "national cultures"), as it is only in communicative performance relating to specific circumstances that a person's intercultural competence can be measured. Nor do we favour concepts focusing on features of personality and the formation of these, for example in the form of "mindful managers". Naturally, tolerance of ambiguity, behavioural flexibility,

respect for otherness, empathy, etc., are excellent features of character and worthy of possessing. But even the most sensitive, empathic, and resilient person may falter in new environments. That person may, for instance, produce feelings of irritation and annoyance in colleagues or business partners by—unknowingly—applying communication strategies which are unsuitable for the situation. Spencer-Oatey & Xing (2000) provide an excellent example of this. Thus, while both cognitive and personality theory approaches have advantages, their drawbacks prevail in so far as the skills, risks, and particularities of practical communication are disregarded by both. In contrast to these approaches, we suggest that the training of the interculturally appropriate use of language should be a central aim of every intercultural training concept, rather than being treated as a desirable extra. Language is taken to include the non-linguistic and para-linguistic aspects of human communication and is treated as a vital element of all the processes of co-constructing identities, roles, and relationships in which we are involved every day. (Goffman, 1959; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). In the context at hand (i.e., the training and learning of intercultural communicative competence) we subscribe to concepts connected with discourse and text analysis. These approaches stress the need to see language as a dynamic, social interactive phenomenon—whether between speaker and listener, or writer and reader.

> […] meaning is conveyed not by single sentences but by more complex exchanges, in which the participants' beliefs and expectations, the knowledge they share about each other and about the world, and the situation in which they interact, play a crucial part. (Crystal, 1991)

Intercultural discourse in ELF

The global use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) is a crucial issue for the training of intercultural competence. It is widely assumed that more than 80% of international meetings where English is used take place without any native speakers of English being present (Graddol, 2006). Against this background, the English used in international/intercultural encounters is currently being recorded with the help of three computer-based corpora focusing on predominantly European, Asian, and academic use, with each of them containing over one million authentic items (VOICE, ELF in Academic Settings, International Corpus of English). Based on empirical data as provided by these corpora and the research of Smith (1983), Wolf & Polzenhagen (2006), Jenkins (2007), Seidlhofer (2007), Gnutzmann (2007), Kirkpatrick (2010), Kirkpatrick & Sussex (2012), and others have identified something that might be called a *Lingua*

Franca Core, and, among other things, have suggested paying particular attention to basic aspects such as pronunciation. Clearly, unless we manage to understand each other, all intercultural endeavour will be in vain. This is not the place to elaborate on the basic tenets of ELF in general, but to consider certain important aspects of it, as this is the variety of English most often used in intercultural encounters as well as in our approach to intercultural training.

Pragmatics plays a special role in ELF contexts, since it refers to questions of *politeness*. Politeness, understood as a process of establishing trustful relationships through communication and interaction, is the paramount prerequisite of any interculturally appropriate use of English (Hickey & Stewart, 2005; Kádár & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011; Reiter, 2009; Spencer-Oatey, 2008; Watts, Ide, & Ehlich, 2005). Interestingly, Spencer-Oatey (2000) uses the broader term "rapport management" rather than "politeness" and distinguishes between management of face and the management of social rights. We have adopted this distinction in critical incidents which we use in our training modules and which aim at identifying features of "quality face" and "social identity Face". As a generic term we nevertheless suggest using "politeness".

Another consideration regards appropriateness. Even if ELF or International English is the primary language of intercultural communication, and although Anglo-American communication conventions—including politeness—may well be adequate and effective when dealing with people from certain parts of the world, it is equally certain that they will often be inappropriate when communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds—regardless of the fact that the language used by all concerned parties is English.

Against this background, the teaching of intercultural competence cannot be achieved "language-free", as it is in practical language-based communication that the identities, roles, and relationships of interlocutors are established. (Goffman, 1959). Additionally, the teaching of ELF should be accompanied by the teaching of cultural differences, of practical ways of dealing with "otherness", and, most of all, of ways of dealing with unexpected and/or difficult situations, behavior, or utterances. For it is politeness—seen as a process of establishing and/or confirming positive relationships—that makes intercultural communication effective, or otherwise (Mader & Camerer, 2012).

To illustrate what this implies for the training of intercultural competence, we suggest looking at three potential *critical incidents* (CIs) which have been used both in intercultural training courses and in train-the-trainer courses. Two of these are connected with face-to-face (oral)

communication, while one addresses issues of written correspondence in intercultural environments. Each of the cases chosen represents a specific type of intercultural misunderstanding and can be supplemented by similar cases. CIs of this type may serve as a starting point for both culture-general and culture-specific discussions in training courses. In most cases these discussions lead to answers combining elements of *knowledge*, *attitude*, and *communicative competence*. These three competencies play a significant role in intercultural empowerment training if serious miscommunication is to be avoided. The use of CIs is a well-established practice in intercultural literature and training. CIs may range from brief descriptions of social episodes, to more sophisticated versions sometimes known as a "culture assimilator". (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001, pp. 253 ff.; Bolten, 2003, p. 371; Knoll, 2006; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, pp. 221 ff.)

In all cases, a misunderstanding or conflict arising from cultural differences is provided, which participants explain in terms of an explicit theoretical model and perhaps re-enact. Although CIs are helpful in many cases, certain drawbacks must not be overlooked, for example the fact that full accounts can never be given and all explanations will probably be guess-work to some extent (Tomalin & Nicks, 2010, p. 12; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001, p. 256-264).

The following three CIs will be discussed with the intention of a) drafting an outline of the aspects involved, b) suggesting potential training goals (e.g. communicative skills), contents, and methods for use in a training concept and c) indicating the limitations of this training concept as well as of intercultural training in general.

The underlying assumptions of all intercultural training should be twofold. Firstly, the focus should be on first, second, or third encounters, since the initial phase of contact is often crucial for the success or failure of relationship-building. Secondly, the explicit intention should be one of developing and/or maintaining a positive and trustful relationship.

Against this background, the following guiding questions may help distinguish culture-specific requirements in each case (Saphiere, Mikk & Devries, 2005):

- How do you show respect to those with whom you are communicating?
- How do you attempt to establish credibility?
- Is it polite to answer a question when you are asked directly?
- Is it best to discuss conflict with the person with whom you disagree?

Business correspondence and trust-building

Intercultural relationship building often begins with (email) correspondence, and it is this initial phase of relationship building that may seriously impact the success or failure of subsequent co-operation. Nevertheless, intercultural correspondence has rarely been a topic of training programmes in the past. This may be due to the assumption that written language adheres to standards more than spoken language. Although this is true to some extent, Anglo-American standard varieties have been tacitly accepted in practically all fields of international business training in English. For instance, a discourse strategy recommended in almost all course books for business correspondence today is summarised with the acronym "KISS" ("keep it short and simple").

The worksheet given in Figure 1, although not a critical incident as such, provides an example of business correspondence with Chinese business partners and addresses aspects connected with *social identity face*, which Spencer-Oatey defines as the desire to be acknowledged in our social identity roles, as distinguished from *quality face* (i.e., the desire to be evaluated positively in terms of personal qualities) (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p. 15f.)

Receiving an email of this nature without any intercultural knowledge may lead to confusion and possibly annoyance. An appropriate reaction to a written message of this nature involves the three components of intercultural communicative competence: communicative and linguistic ability, attitudes, and knowledge of cultural differences. Linguistic ability at a certain level is necessary in order to identify the main message, as is knowledge that face-saving strategies are used in different ways in communication in different cultures, and tolerance of "otherness", when receiving what may seem an unnecessarily verbose way of saying "we want our money!"

Showing respect in most Asian contexts requires active face-work along the lines demonstrated in the "email rated as the most successful one by Chinese business managers" (Zhu, 2005). Polite conventions of Chinese business correspondence are not vanishing at the speed at which China is developing economically. Confirmation of this is given by Kirkpatrick (2010) and Kirkpatrick & Sussex (2012), also by experienced interculturalists working in China known to us.

In view of this, using the "KISS" strategy at the beginning of a business relationship in large parts of Asia might be a first step to failure. In the eyes of Western business people, on the other hand, the "most effective email" may appear even impolite to some, since apparently information had already been obtained from the partner's bank regarding

the credibility of information provided—an act which might be considered offensive by Western recipients.

3.1 THE MOST EFFECTIVE E-MAIL

In a study of Chinese business correspondence collected in mainland China after 2001, Professor Yunxia Zhu* of Queensland University, Australia, documented politeness patterns, which she identified as typical for Chinese written business communication. The email rated as the most successful one by Chinese business managers is given below. Only the translation of the text is provided here.

ATTN: Mr Wang Jiawei,

How are you?

Happy New Year! Wish you prosperity!

I have recently received Contract AS-6589 signed by your company. Thank you for ordering 60x58 cotton shopping bags. We are extremely grateful to you for your cooperation and support at the beginning of the New Year. In order to guarantee the time of delivery now we are making adequate arrangements to design samples and prepare materials according to your order. You can trust our commitment to collaboration.

At the same time, our company sent over 104,000 cotton bags and the delivery number is CVC/B 98055. We haven't received your payment yet. According to Mr Zhang, the payment of US$ 35,490 was sent on November 30. However, we consulted with Henan Branch, China Bank and found that no payment had been made by your bank so far. We kindly ask Mr Lian [the addressee**] to help check about this at your earliest convenience because delayed payment may affect directly the carrying out of our sales orders. Please think about the possible further collaboration between you and us. I hope that you can help Mr Zhang sort out this issue.

Thank you for your cooperation! Happy New Year!

Zhen Liangchen (shang)

** The writer addresses the reader in the 3rd person with the title 'Mr. Liang' in order to show respect and politeness.

Discuss with your partner:

a)   What strikes you as special about Mr. Liangchen's email?

b)   Which features make Mr. Liangchen's email different to what is often taught in Business English course books today?

c)   Do you think written politeness conventions in China may have adapted to Anglo-American conventions and be different today?

d)   Write a reply!

* Yunxia Zhu (2005). Effective Communication in Chinese Business Fax Writing. In F. Bargiela-Chiappini / M. Gotti (eds.)(2005). Asian Business Discourse(s). p.114ff.

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Figure 1. The most effective email

All this implies being able to write in English with a certain level of communicative competence. Grammatical mistakes are generally unimportant as it is rare that they lead to confusion or misunderstanding, although vocabulary mistakes may be more serious. However, this type of writing in intercultural contexts involves knowledge of cultural conventions which may be transferred into English used internationally and interculturally. Knowledge of diverse concepts of face and face-saving strategies, both for personal and social face, will be useful, as will a certain level of tolerance in accepting what may seem an unnecessarily verbose message. Nonetheless the main task and thus the skill to be acquired is a combination of all these elements and involves replying to the message in a way that does not negatively affect the relationship.

Language required

Learners of business correspondence in (international) English should therefore be familiarised with non-Anglo-American conventions and expectations of their partners in correspondence. The practical training success should be rated with at least two criteria: Firstly the level of linguistic accuracy which allows the correspondent to appear as a competent partner in communication. Perhaps more important, however, is the appropriate use of politeness conventions which—at least to some extent—meet the expectations of the recipient (Camerer, 2014). This is precisely where many intercultural training concepts have failed.

Discourse strategies in ELF

Preparing for intercultural encounters should include knowledge of diverse communication styles and competent judgement as to the appropriate use of these. This implies a great deal of country/culture-specific preparation for what may be encountered. The aspects of face-to-face communication which may be particularly crucial in first and second encounters are the following:

- *Directness:* How straightforwardly am I expected to communicate in a particular situation? Am I expected to say exactly what I want or to "hint" at something in a more indirect manner?
- *Enthusiasm:* How much emotion and energy am I expected to show when communicating. Can I express how I feel, or is it more appropriate to hide my feelings? Is "interrupting" someone considered a positive sign of commitment, or is it a taboo?

- *Formality:* How much deference and respect am I expected to display in my style of communication? Am I expected to show a high level of respect when communicating with someone in a particular situation, or can I be more informal?
- *Assertiveness:* How strongly am I expected or allowed to voice my opinion and advocate my point of view in a particular culture and in a particular situation in that culture? Should I be forthright in expressing myself, or should I work at hiding or sublimating my point of view?
- *Self-promotion:* To what extent can I speak positively about myself in a given cultural situation? Should I actively promote my positive qualifications? If yes, should I do this strongly or in a self-effacing manner?
- *Personal disclosure:* To what extent is it appropriate to reveal personal information about myself to others? Should I be open and forward in expressing details about my life, or is it more appropriate to hide these personal details? (Molinsky, 2013, p. 49f).

The worksheet given in Figure 2 provides an example of differences in the display of emotions and in personal disclosure in a critical encounter between Richard (Danish) and Stefanie (Chinese). Both seem to be unaware of each other's concept of "appropriate" communication in this context, although they have worked together harmoniously for some time. This incident provokes a crisis of trust on both sides and the eventual break-off of contact. In fact, everything seems to go wrong in this episode. Stefanie will have considered how the information was given as inconsiderate and inappropriate. Therefore, the reason given by Richard for his extended absence and the way it was expressed might have appeared to her as untrue. For her, any information of such a serious character touches on levels of personal feeling (in this case grief) and would need to be addressed indirectly or not at all, given the nature of their relationship. Finally, breaking off contact could only be done without explicitly addressing Richard's faux-pas.

Richard, interestingly, distinguishes between the cognitive and emotional aspects of relationship building:

> Now, intellectually I was quite aware that people from some Asian cultures hide their nervousness, embarrassment or severe stress with a laugh. I also knew I should have broken my sad news much more gently. After all, Stefanie was a Chinese person raised in the Confucian way: She revered her parents. For her the sudden realization that she could perhaps lose both of them almost at the same time must have come as a terrible shock.

Nevertheless my immediate reaction to her laugh was visceral. I felt as though I had just been hit very hard in the stomach. Even though I understood rationally what had happened I had difficulty relating to Stefanie as I had before the incident." (Gesteland, 1999, p. 38)

In other words, knowledge about cultural codes "behind" the language used, in this case English as a lingua franca (ELF), is not enough. The use of ELF by both parties (i.e., neither is a native speaker of English) may even mean that culture-bound attitudes, expressed in diverse discourse strategies, are largely concealed from the other participant. What remained concealed in this incident were incompatible views about the time, location, communication, and other circumstances of personal disclosure (e.g., how close the relationship was before the incident) which caused the irreconcilable clash.

Language required

It should therefore be made clear that relying on discourse strategies which are common and usually appropriate in Anglophone countries is not enough. The global use of ELF would require that it be used with intercultural competence. This presents a challenge both for trainers and participants, requiring intercultural knowledge and sensitivity but also, perhaps primarily, meta-communicative skills, something which Farzad Sharifian (2013) refers to as "metacultural competence".

Metacultural competence… involves an awareness of the need for conceptual negotiation strategies to make communication of cultural conceptualizations smooth and effective… In general… metacultural competence enables interlocutors to communicate and negotiate cultural meanings during the process of intercultural communication. (Sharifian 2013, p. 73ff; see also Müller-Jacquier & Thije, 2005; Sharifian 2009, p. 242-253; Sharifian, 2012, pp. 310-322; Scollon & Wong Scollon 2001, pp. 76 ff.)

The question often asked of how far one wishes to adapt to one's partner in communication also applies in this case. Richard would not have felt comfortable hiding the reasons for his absence and possibly his behaviour from Stefanie. He may even have felt that this would seem heartless towards his deceased parents. In his culture, it would seem strange not to mention this highly important occurrence. Stefanie however would probably not have thought that it was at all strange if Richard had not told her and she had found out about his parents' death from someone else. One way of accommodating both these discourse conventions could