

RESOURCES

FOR
**CULTURAL
LANGUAGE
LEARNING**

JOSEPH LO BIANCO

Background information
and training materials
about an intercultural
approach to teaching
language

RESOURCES FOR CULTURAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

Joseph Lo Bianco

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Resources for Cultural Language Learning

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INTRODUCTION

This resource aims to give general guidance and background information for establishing and supporting programs in teaching languages and cultures in Australia's multicultural society. These programs may be community language programs or second language programs in schools, Universities or other educational organisations.

It is not intended that the package be comprehensive; rather it aims to support and guide program developers, teachers, trainers and others in delivering and developing language programs that incorporate an intercultural approach to teaching language. Intercultural language teaching integrates cultural knowledge within a language teaching program.

In this resource you will find background reading about culture and language teaching, supported by handouts and overheads that can be used to stimulate discussion. It also includes a comprehensive bibliography.

Resources for Cultural Language Learning is intended to supplement and enrich existing material.

The basis of this material started with a research project funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs that Language Australia undertook in 1998 and 1999. The project investigated a range of types of community language programs. The programs were in the indigenous languages Noongar and Yindjibarndi; Khmer; and the immigrant languages Arabic, Italian and Chinese. The programs examined were located in Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. The final project report titled "A Description and Exploratory Evaluation of program Types in Indigenous and Community Languages" is available from CAE Press.

CULTURAL LEARNING IN MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

Language competencies and Intercultural competence

To 'know a language' is a very complex matter involving many layers of interrelated knowledge, behaviour and skill. Using a language that you know is even more complex since this requires cultural knowledge and competence. It is often assumed that cultural knowledge, sensitivity, and competence will emerge inevitably from linguistic competence. However, in recent years it has become increasingly clear that culture competence does not necessarily flow automatically from the learning of a second language.

The most general aim of second language education is to achieve communicative competence (Canale and Swain 1980). Communicative competence is made up of several related but distinctive parts:

- Grammatical competence. This refers to the knowledge of the language code (pronunciation, vocabulary, rules of grammar, writing and its conventions etc.)
- Sociolinguistic competence. This refers to mastery of how to use the code i.e., the appropriate application, in given situations, of elements such as vocabulary and register. Issues such as the relations and distance between the speakers, formality-informality, directness-indirectness, politeness rules etc. are involved in sociolinguistic competence.
- Discourse competence. This refers to the capacity to combine language structures into a variety of coherent and cohesive texts e.g., poetry, or political speech.
- Strategic competence. This refers to the ability to enhance communication through knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies.

There is another category of competence that is labelled in different ways. It refers to 'how to get things done' in the language. This has been called *Actional Competence*: 'knowing how to convey and understand communicative intent in the performance and interpretation of speech acts and language functions' (Celce-Murcia 1994: 57-58). Actional competence is based on the insight that language involves action, i.e. doing things. Promising, threatening, inviting, apologising and other such actions are principally or totally conducted in and through language. Language teaching increasingly tries to assist learners to master this field of competence which is critical to being successful in using the language.

All of these competencies in language are affected by culture. 'Culture' has been a problem for second language education. There have been many approaches to the treatment of culture within second language education. In a detailed categorisation of classroom 'teaching' of culture, Murphy (1988) identified four broad approaches:

- The Civilisation Approach: In this approach culture is treated as a homogenous and universal entity i.e. culture as Civilisation. In the Civilisation approach culture is usually taught completely separately from the teaching of the second language. Culture is treated as a set of facts or phenomena and taught content within a curriculum of its own. Culture therefore is an object of study and not an activity that learners engage in.
- The Audio-Lingual Approach: In this approach there is no specific cultural aspect to the second language curriculum. The language curriculum aims to produce grammatical correctness and assumes that culture is a separate matter altogether which

can be dealt with after linguistic competence has been achieved.

- **The Communicative Approach:** In this approach to second language teaching and learning it is assumed that culture can influence communication and therefore the teaching of culture is as an aid to the teaching of effective communication. In this approach culture refers to a series of non-linguistic elements required to enhance linguistic communication. So culture is only taught where it is needed for pragmatic communication.
- **The Intercultural Approach:** In this approach to culture, language itself is seen as a 'system of signs'; that is, language is a cultural practice. Teaching language necessarily involves teaching culture. Language and culture are inseparable. Research into language use is used to indicate how language and culture are inextricable and how to teach culture in language, and therefore interculturalism.

In a later formulation Risager (1998) suggests a different grouping according to a study of European classrooms. Risager suggests that teachers have progressed from a *foreign-cultures* approach (losing ground since the 1980s); to an *intercultural* approach (the main European approach today); towards a *multicultural* approach (emerging in multiethnic societies) and a *transcultural* approach (likely to be felt in the future through globalisation). According to Byram and Zarate (in Byram 1995: 25-27) there are four kinds of knowledge and skill needed for interculturalism in second language programs:

- The first of these relates to attitudes and values: "An affective capacity to relinquish ethnocentric attitudes towards and perceptions of otherness, and a cognitive ability to establish and maintain a relationship between native cultures and foreign cultures".

- The second skill and knowledge for interculturalism is the ability to learn: "An ability to produce and operate an interpretative system with which to gain insight into hitherto unknown cultural meanings, beliefs and practices, either in a familiar or a new language and culture".
- The third skill is a kind of knowledge: "A system of cultural references which structures the implicit and explicit knowledge acquired in the course of linguistic and cultural learning, and which takes into account the specific needs of the learner in his/her interaction with speakers of the foreign language".
- And fourthly, knowing how: "A capacity to integrate ... [the above] ... in specific situations of bicultural contact, e.g. between the culture(s) of the learner and one of those associated with the target language".

If a person has gained the knowledge and skill identified above they would be considered an 'intercultural speaker':

An intercultural speaker is someone who can operate their linguistic competence and their sociolinguistic awareness of the relationship between language and the context in which it is used, in order to manage interaction across cultural boundaries, to anticipate misunderstandings caused by difference in values, meanings and beliefs, and thirdly, to cope with the affective as well as cognitive demands of engagement with otherness (Byram 1995).

Therefore there are many ways to see culture in language teaching. The Australian situation is not exactly like the European, North American or Asian settings of foreign language teaching given our history and circumstances.

Competency Outcomes

Many language programs, especially community language programs, aim for a different kind of cultural outcome from regular second language teaching, or the teaching of second languages based solely on linguistic objectives.

These outcomes can be described as Cultural Recognition Competence, Intercultural Interaction Competence and Multicultural Creativity Competence.

Level One Competence: Cultural Recognition

In the first intercultural competence the learner gains an insight into him or herself as a cultural being. Learners come to recognise the cultural dimension of everyday life. Recognising the cultural dimension of everyday life involves seeing peoples' behaviour as being influenced and shaped by culture, and not random, idiosyncratic or perverse. We can consider culture as being behaviour patterns that we 'take for granted', or assumptions we make about how things should be, and what we consider to be the 'natural' way that things are done, or thought about. We tend to view our beliefs and behaviour as natural while the beliefs and behaviour of others we may consider strange, odd, exotic, difficult or funny. This is because our cultural values are considered natural since most of the time we live in communities with others whose cultural values are like our own. We tend to notice only things that are different from our own.

We tend to regard our language and behaviour as being 'natural' and others' language and behaviour as being 'different' or odd. Sometimes of course we also regard others' behaviour as being difficult or problematical. Problems, both trivial and very serious, can arise when there are no shared histories and when a tendency to see difference negatively becomes established.

Self-knowledge is the first part of the of Cultural Recognition Competence. Others' attitudes and

behaviour, skills, knowledge, interests etc. are as culturally shaped as our own. To achieve this competence, learners need to become trained observers of their own language behaviour. This is a productive method for advancing the attainment of these goals, the language learner acting as a scientist of culture, an ethnographer, using the methodology of anthropology, i.e., participant observation.

Level Two Competence: Intercultural Awareness

Recognition is an important first step towards the goal of intercultural competence. However on its own, recognition is insufficient. After recognising the cultural dimension of life the next step is to have this recognition extended to others. If our lives are influenced by the culture of which we are a part then this must also be true of others' lives and culture must be as taken for granted, assumed and made as natural for them as it is for us. In short, there is a need to extend cultural recognition to others' behaviour. The purpose of this is to impart knowledge that interaction across cultures and languages can be aided by such recognition.

When we communicate across cultures we draw on our cultural assumptions and that in cross-cultural communication we should make some of these assumptions explicit and openly discuss cultural differences. Such negotiation across culture can lead to skills in effective cross-cultural communication. We will be able to predict points of possible difference, we will learn where we might need to point out openly why our thinking or behaviour is the way it is, and we will know how to interpret some of the actions and statements of others in a better light.

Learners need to recognise the workings of culture in their own lives and in the lives of others. Different cultural practices exist because different communities of humans have responded to identical human needs within

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LANGUAGE AND CULTURE TRAINING MATERIALS

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LANGUAGE LEARNING: FACTS & OPINIONS

1 Languages are learned mainly through imitation

Language learning does not happen solely through imitation. Language learners create their own system of rules through the development of hypotheses about how language works.

2 Parents usually correct young children when they make grammatical errors

Parents tend to correct their children only when it interferes with communication.

C O N T I N U E D ►

LANGUAGE LEARNING: FACTS & OPINIONS

8 Teachers should teach simple language structures before complex ones

No matter how a language is presented to learners, certain structures are acquired before others. This suggests that it is neither necessary nor desirable to restrict learners' exposure to certain linguistic structures which are perceived by a linguist as being 'simple'.

9 Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits

Errors are a natural part of language learning. They show the patterns of learners' developing interlanguage systems. Only when errors are persistent do teachers need to bring the problem to the learner's attention.

C O N T I N U E D ►

(Lightbown, P & Spada, N (1993) *How Languages are Learned*, Oxford University Press).

TENDENCIES IN DESCRIBING CULTURE

1 **Overstatement of the importance of culture:**

- humans are perceived as being prisoners of patterns of behaviour, beliefs and values, no successful interaction with other cultures is possible.

2 **Understatement of the importance of culture:**

- culture is restricted to the arts and high literature, it has no impact on daily life, conflicts between different cultural groups comes from economic, political or individual differences only.



AIM OF INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE TEACHING

The ultimate goal of Intercultural Language Teaching is to help learners transcend their monocultural view of the world through the learning of a foreign language.



Crozet, C and Liddicoat, A. J (1999) "The Challenge of Intercultural Language Teaching: Engaging with Culture in the Classroom". In Lo Bianco, J, Liddicoat, A. J. and Crozet, C. (eds). *Striving for the Third Place*. Language Australia. Melbourne (pp.113-125).

THREE STEPS OF INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE TEACHING

- **Learning about cultures**
- **Comparing cultures**
- **Intercultural exploration**

C O N T I N U E D ►

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Learning about cultures:

It has been a commonly held belief that the best way to learn about a foreign culture was to be “exposed” to it. Study abroad does not necessarily lead to a better knowledge of a culture or improved cross-cultural understanding. Sometimes overseas experiences can be negative. The emerging consensus now is that culture is not learnt by osmosis, it requires an intellectual effort because culture is not always accessible to be noticed, analysed and taught. Culture is embedded in language as an intangible, all-pervasive and highly variable force. How then are we to capture it in order to teach it?

We suggest that the macro levels of culture (i.e. archaic, residual and emergent) in language use can be broken down into more specific features which show points of articulation between language and culture directly convertible into teachable material.



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Culture Language

culture in context	→	World knowledge
culture in general structure of text	→	spoken/written genres
culture within shorter units of text	→	pragmatic norms norms
culture in organisation of units of text	→	norms of interaction
culture in linguistic structures/words/syntax/non-verbal	→	grammar/lexicon kinesics/prosody pronunciation

Language

Points of articulation between culture and language



Crozet, C and Liddicoat, A. J (1999) "The Challenge of Intercultural Language Teaching: Engaging with Culture in the Classroom". In Lo Bianco, J., Liddicoat, A. J. and Crozet, C. (eds). *Striving for the Third Place*. Language Australia. Melbourne (pp.113-125).

Learning about Cultures

World knowledge in a foreign culture corresponds to what has been meant traditionally by “teaching culture”. It encompasses the teaching of the general cultural traits and ways of life of a society, including literature, critical literacy, history, geography, institutions and the arts. This “cultural” world knowledge is closer to culture than to language *per se*.

Culture in spoken and written genres is embedded in the general structure of text. For example culture is found in the way official or intimate letters are written in different countries, the type of information which ought to come first and last, what is acceptable content, etc. A speech, (as a genre of oral text), also reflects culture in the way it has been structured.

C O N T I N U E D ►

Learning about Cultures

Pragmatic and interactional norms refer to the way culture is manifested in spoken and written language. In pragmatic norms, culture is visible in shorter units of texts such as speech acts (e.g. thanking in Japanese differs from thanking in Australian English). Interactional norms refer to the way units of speech, such as openings or closings in a conversation, are organised.

In grammar, lexicon, kinesics, prosody and pronunciation, culture is also present, interwoven into linguistic structures, words, syntax and non-verbal language.

Learning about culture, and how culture links up with language, is a complex task and requires language teachers to rethink the content of their subject matter.



MAIN FEATURES OF INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH

The following table shows the main features of Intercultural Language Teaching:

- 1 Culture is not acquired through osmosis. It must be taught explicitly.
- 2 The bilingual / multilingual speaker should be the norm.
- 3 Conceptual and experiential learning is required to acquire intercultural competence.
- 4 Roles of teachers and learners are redefined.
- 5 New approaches to language testing are needed to assess intercultural competence.

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1 Culture is not acquired through osmosis. It must be taught explicitly.

This principle has enormous implications for language teachers. Teachers will have to learn to depict “the cultural factor” in all spoken and written forms of language before they can teach it. They will have to be able to do so in their native language-culture as well as the language-culture they aim to teach since Intercultural Language Teaching implies the comparison of cultures. This crucial aspect of Intercultural Language Teaching becomes even more complex if we consider that the language classroom is becoming a *multicultural* rather than just a *bicultural* context. A language learner of Japanese in Australia is no longer necessarily a monolingual speaker of English but might have another language like Arabic as their mother tongue.

C O N T I N U E D ►

From the language teacher's point of view the aim is to help this language learner recognise "the cultural factor" in the three languages the learner is using or with which they have some familiarity. This emphasizes the need for teachers to identify culture as an explorative process they can undertake with learners rather than having to solely rely on research in cross-cultural discourse. No research could cater for all possible cross-cultural combinations teachers encounter in the increasingly multicultural language classroom. Teachers who wish to implement Intercultural Language Teaching need to study what culture in language use means and how to go about finding it.



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4 Roles of teachers and learners are redefined.

A successful implementation of Intercultural Language Teaching requires teachers to become not only learners of language but also “learners of culture”. As Intercultural Language Teaching also involves self-reflection (i.e. learning about one’s own culture) the best classroom environment is one which favours a learner-centred approach which does not however undermine the learner’s need to be taught about culture in language use. Learners need to be given the space to explore the target language-culture and at the same time they need to be taught about the “cultural factor” in the target language by well informed teachers.



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5 New approaches to language testing are needed to assess intercultural competence.

The assessment of intercultural competence has not yet entered the realm of language testing. When it does it is bound to transform radically the very way we have conceived the goals of language teaching and learning. The main challenge will be to stop thinking of language learning in terms of the acquisition of skills only and to shift to a more holistic and dynamic view of language education which is both product and process oriented.



Crozet, C and Liddicoat, A. J (1999) "The Challenge of Intercultural Language Teaching: Engaging with Culture in the Classroom". In Lo Bianco, J, Liddicoat, A. J. and Crozet, C. (eds). *Striving for the Third Place*. Language Australia. Melbourne (pp.113-125).

TIPS ON HOW TO MAKE USE OF NATURALLY OCCURRING TARGET LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENTS

Naturalistic immersion opportunities

Language students need ample and regular opportunities to encounter the language in naturalistic settings. In popular parlance this allows them to 'pick up' the language. It is important for young learners to interact with age peers who are native speakers of the target language or who are at least confident users. This encourages the learner to acquire the norms which are appropriate to his/her age but often also aids motivation and incentive to learn.




Lo Bianco, J. (1995) *Consolidating Gains – Recovering Ground A Review of Languages Other Than English in South Australian Schools*. Report to Minister for Education and Children's Services. NLLIA, Canberra.

TIPS

Domain opportunity

A domain is a social space, or area, in which a particular language is used and expected to be used. Not all such domains are ‘open’ or available to learners. The expression Domain Opportunity refers to the relative openness of particular domains where the target language is used. It is often assumed unproblematically that a learning opportunity exists where there is a community of speakers of the target language. For complex reasons of both closure to outsiders and of the tendency of native speakers to modify their normal speech to accommodate outsiders, proximity does not automatically translate into opportunities for use and openness of domain. Where such domains are available they can be used creatively for learning. Bilingual classrooms can be very powerful domains for ‘schooled’ versions of the target language.



Lo Bianco, J. (1995) *Consolidating Gains – Recovering Ground A Review of Languages Other Than English in South Australian Schools*. Report to Minister for Education and Children’s Services. NLLIA, Canberra.