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Résumé : *L'objectif du présent article est de présenter les résultats d'un projet de recherche mené entre 2004-2007 par le Centre européen pour les langues modernes (CELM) dans le cadre des activités du Conseil de l'Europe. L'article commence par la présentation synthétique des aspects théoriques de l'évaluation de la compétence interculturelle selon le cadre conceptuel développé par le groupe de recherche du CELM. Après avoir exposé les principes de l'interprétation alternative de la compétence interculturelle de communication, on suggère un éventail de tâches évaluatives. La présente étude permet de mettre à la disposition des enseignants les outils nécessaires pour évaluer la compétence interculturelle et contribue ainsi à la promotion de l'éducation interculturelle en classe de langue.*

Mots-clés: *apprentissage interculturel, compétence interculturelle, méthodes d'évaluation, barèmes d'évaluation de performance, tâches évaluatives*

Abstract: *The aim of this article is to present the findings of a research project which was carried out by the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in 2004-2007. The article begins with a brief survey of the theoretical aspects of assessing intercultural communicative competence in relation to the conceptual framework developed by the ECML research group. After an explanation of this alternative interpretation of intercultural communicative competence, an inventory of assessment tasks is suggested. The study intends to help teachers to promote intercultural learning in a language classroom by providing them with necessary guidance on assessing their students' intercultural communicative competence.*

Keywords: *intercultural learning, intercultural communicative competence, assessment methods, rating scales of performance, assessment tasks*

Introduction

Essentially, the process of teaching and learning a foreign language embodies the presence of another culture as well as contact with Otherness. An encounter with Otherness - whether national, racial, or ethnic - is experienced as a challenge

to the existing beliefs, values, and behaviours of people. This challenge may have a twofold effect, leading either to a confrontational relationship with Other, in which Self and Other are experienced as incompatible; or leading to a relationship of acceptance where Self and Other are trying to negotiate a cultural platform that is satisfactory to all parties involved (Guilherme 2000). Establishing open-mindedness, tolerance of difference, and respect for Self and Other is now widely accepted as among the most effective ways of promoting intercultural communication in the foreign language classroom. Although most teachers do not deny the importance of intercultural communication in their language course curriculum, few teachers actively assess whether their students are attaining their intercultural learning goals or not. The problem may be due to the fact that teachers are uncertain as to how intercultural communicative competence (ICC) should be evaluated. For example, should they assess language or culture, simultaneously or separately? Indeed, some scholars raise the question of whether intercultural learning can be explicitly tested (Kramsch 1993). Nevertheless, if we accept the fact that a foreign language course should contain an intercultural component, and that in addition to the linguistic component, language learners need to acquire sensitivity to differences in behaviour, attitudes and values of people of other cultures, then it is necessary to specify the ways of assessing students' intercultural learning.

The aim of the current article is to propose an inventory of ICC assessment tasks as designed within the framework of the research project of the medium-term programme of activities of the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe in 2004-2007. The project that forms the basis of this article was part of a larger research project "Intercultural Communicative Competence in Teacher Education" involving academics from seven countries: Prof. D. Lussier from Canada, Assoc. Prof. L. Skopinskaja from Estonia, D. Ivanus from Romania, S. Wiesinger from Austria, Prof. S. Chavdarova Kostova from Bulgaria, Assoc. Prof. K. Golubina from Russia and G. de la Maya Retamar from Spain.

In order to create a relevant inventory of ICC assessment tasks it is necessary to:

- clearly define the field of ICC in all its dimensions
- survey and classify appropriate methods of assessment of ICC
- develop assessment tools to determine learners' progress in intercultural learning.

I. Definitions of intercultural competence, intercultural speaker and intercultural communicative competence

Before an assessment model for evaluating intercultural learning can be provided, it is essential to refer to basic definitions of intercultural competence, an intercultural speaker and intercultural communicative competence.

One of the aims of the language classroom is the development of learners' intercultural competence, which may be defined as the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures other than one's own (Guilherme 2000). In order for this to happen, learners first need to gain insight into the target language culture, and then reflect on their own culture (that is, on its culturally

determined values, behaviour patterns and ways of thinking) in relation to other cultures (McKay 2002). In other words, in acquiring knowledge about and reflecting on the target language culture, learners need to be encouraged not simply to observe similarities and differences between the cultures, but they should also be able to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others, thus establishing a relationship between their own and other systems. Interacting effectively across cultures implies therefore the criss-crossing of identities and the “positions” to which people are summoned as well as how they produce and “perform” these positions (Hall, 1996: 13-14). In the context of foreign language education, the learner becomes an “intercultural speaker”, someone who has the ability to interact with others, to mediate between different cultural identifications, and to accept other perceptions of the world. In Byram and Zarate’s words, an “intercultural speaker” is someone who “crosses frontiers, and who is to some extent a specialist in the transit of cultural property and symbolic values” (Byram and Zarate, 1997: 11). However, Guilherme cautions that the “intercultural speaker” is not a cosmopolitan being who is floating over cultures, but someone who is committed to turning intercultural encounters into intercultural relationships (Guilherme 2000).

1.1. Conceptual frameworks of intercultural communicative competence

The process of becoming interculturally competent is much more complex than just realising that there are Self and Others. It requires certain attitudes, knowledge and skills to be promoted, in addition to learners’ linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence. Accordingly, Byram and Zarate identify the following components of ICC within foreign language education: “savoirs” (knowledge of Self and Other), “savoir comprendre” (skills of interpreting and relating), “savoir être” (intercultural attitudes), and “savoir faire/apprendre” (skills of discovery and interaction) (Byram and Zarate, 1997 : 11). Furthermore, Byram distinguishes “savoir s’engager” (critical cultural awareness) as the centre of his model of ICC (Byram, 1997: 54).

These “savoirs” also form part of the classification of ICC adopted by the “Common European Framework of Reference” (2001) where they have been developed into: “savoir” (declarative knowledge), “savoir faire” (skills and know-how), “savoir être” (existential competence), and “savoir apprendre” (ability to learn).

Despite recent research in the field of ICC (Byram and Zarate 1997; Byram 1997; Balboni 2006), the relationship between teaching-and-learning language-and-culture (Byram and Morgan’s term) (Byram and Morgan 1994) and ICC assessment issues seems to have been underestimated, hence there is a need for a new conceptual framework of ICC. For the present research, the model designed by Prof Denise Lussier from McGill University (Canada) was chosen as a working model since it specifies the relationships between savoirs, savoir faire and savoir être of language learners with a view to obtaining a profile of their intercultural learning experiences (Lussier 1997). Accordingly, the three dimensions in assessing ICC are the following:

- savoirs, relating to the declarative knowledge profile which takes into account both small “c” culture and capital “C” culture aspects, such as ways of life, customary practices, music, arts, architecture, literature, history, individual and social norms of reference. It refers to collective memory, diversity in the ways of living as well as the sociocultural context of the target language communities.
- savoir faire, referring to the behavioural profile which is concerned with different forms of behaviour in the target language and culture, plurilingual and pluricultural practices from the family, cultural and social environment of individuals, aiming at the development of specific skills related to various contexts of communication.
- savoir être, referring to the attitudinal profile which is concerned with the mental representations of individuals and the development of attitudes able to cross over from self-awareness to sensitivity towards Otherness, acceptance of and respect for the values of other cultures (Lussier et al. 2004).

II. Methods of assessing intercultural communicative competence

The assessment of the three components of ICC is complex but rewarding as it provides feedback to students related to their intercultural learning, and it also informs teachers about the nature and level of their students’ intercultural performance. Moreover, the focus here is not on how much cultural information has been obtained by the learners during a course, but on how intercultural performance has been integrated within the teaching/learning process, and on how the learners’ progress has been determined.

In this context, distinction should be made between formative and summative assessment. The former is carried out during the course as an ongoing process, with the aim of giving students guidance on their performance, and improving the learning process, while the latter evaluates the learners’ achievement at the end of a course, with a final grade or mark (Brindley, 2001). Since ICC covers cognitive, behavioural and affective domains, its evaluation should be formative rather than summative (Lussier et al. 2007).

Secondly, the assessment of ICC should be continuous, and not administered at one or two instances during a course (Lussier et al. 2007). ICC may be assessed either by the teacher, or by the students themselves where they evaluate their own performance, or projects completed during the course (self-evaluation).

Thirdly, assessment can be carried out at different phases of a course. For example, a pre-test intends to find out the initial level of the students’ intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes before the course starts, a test during the course can “gauge progress and increase motivation” (Corbett, 2003: 194), and a post-test measures the students’ intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes after the course has ended, giving thus some indication of the effectiveness of intercultural learning.

Fourthly, different types of test format may be resorted to at different stages of an intercultural course, depending on the goals of instruction. Tests may be roughly divided into objective and subjective ones. The former require no evaluative judgement on the part of the assessor, whereas the latter involve some

kind of personal evaluation of the assessee's performance. When assessing ICC, the teacher becomes an observer of the process of ICC development, and not only of its end product, therefore objective tests may be good for testing intercultural knowledge, but not necessarily for skills and attitudes. For a more global assessment of all the three dimensions of ICC, subjective tests are preferable.

A further distinction is made between holistic and analytic assessment. The former means making a global impressionistic judgement about the learners' performance on a task as a whole, whereas the latter requires that the assessor should observe closely all the three dimensions of ICC, or each dimension separately in order to come out with different profiles of learner performance (Lussier et al. 2007).

Finally, the assessment of ICC may be either direct or indirect. The former measures learner performance directly by requiring the assessees to perform a role play (*savoir faire*), or discuss another culture's attitudes (*savoir être*) in a small group with the assessor matching their performance to the most appropriate categories on a criteria grid. Indirect assessment, on the other hand, is a pen-and-paper test, which often assesses intercultural knowledge (Lussier et al. 2007).

The rating scale for assessing each of the dimensions of ICC - *savoirs*, *savoir faire* and *savoir être* - includes certain indicators to define relevant levels of ICC proficiency: low profile, medium profile, and high profile. It combines descriptors and criteria of performance to describe each level of ICC, presuming that concrete tasks may be performed with a particular degree of proficiency at one level rather than at another (Lussier et al, 2007).

III. Assessing the three dimensions of intercultural communicative competence

In the literature on assessment, a test is considered to be valid if it measures what it actually claims to assess; a test is reliable if the measurement data of assessees are consistent; and a test is practical if the assessment procedure is economical to administer. These three qualities, pertinent to ICC assessment, intend to ensure equity in our judgement when assessing students' intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes.

To ensure test validity, reliability and practicality in the field of ICC assessment, it is necessary, first of all, to specify the kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes we are judging.

III.1. Assessing intercultural knowledge/savoirs

In regard to the first dimension of ICC, that of *savoirs*, the goal is to evaluate the learners' understanding of the similarities and differences between the world of origin and the world of the target language community. So far the assessment of ICC has been limited to the knowledge profile only (Valette 1977), being carried out by means of objective tests like multiple-choice, true and false statements, and short question-answer tests, all aiming at assessing the so-called "shallow learning", such as the memorisation of cultural facts (Corbett, 2003: 196). The assessment of "deep learning" with the help of the proposed

assessment inventory, on the contrary, would involve the learners' ability to compare, regroup, infer, appreciate, synthesise, and judge the information found in the texts (Lussier et al. 2007).

The criteria to assess *savoirs* are categorised in terms of low, medium and high levels of performance, as proposed by the INCA project (Council of Europe, 2005). At the low level of proficiency, the so-called level of recognition, the learners can produce simple descriptions in writing or orally and identify a limited number of cultural facts related to their own culture, or to the target language culture. When questioned, the learners at this level may refer to stereotyped cultural ideas or images. At the medium level, the so-called level of comparison, the learners possess diversified cultural images and concrete knowledge about cultural facts and can gradually build on and modify the information acquired. They are able to compare cultural facts with their own life experience, and regroup different types of cultural characteristics. At the high level of performance, the so-called level of analysis, learners demonstrate a deep knowledge of specific characteristics of other cultures (e.g. products and practices, traditions, values, etc), and a clear perception of diverse cultural images. They can infer meaning from different sources, analyse, appreciate and evaluate different types of cultural characteristics (Lussier et al. 2007).

III.2. Assessing intercultural know-how/*savoir faire*

Until now, in terms of the second dimension of ICC, *savoir faire*, the emphasis has been more on the linguistic aspect of communicative competence that reflects the degree of students' ability to function and interact in the target language. However, in regard to ICC we need to take into account how students adjust to the requirements of the social and cultural environment of the target language culture and mediate in intercultural exchanges, that is, how they integrate experiences in the target language to use efficiently their communicative competence as intercultural speakers (Lussier et al. 2007).

The rating scale for assessing the aforementioned dimension of *savoir faire* is as follows. At the low level, the learners are able to function in the target language, linguistically correctly but socially in an inappropriate manner, displaying little experience of interaction in ambiguous intercultural contexts. At the medium level, the learners are able to use appropriate verbal and non-verbal language, adjusting themselves to conflicting intercultural situations and reacting appropriately in social encounters. At the high level of proficiency, the learners are able to participate successfully in intercultural interactions, taking into account the sociocultural context as well as the input obtained from their interlocutors, easily mediating between the conflicting interpretations of cultural phenomena (Lussier et al 2007).

III.3. Assessing intercultural being/*savoir être*

The assessment of the third dimension of ICC, that of *savoir être*, proceeds through three levels: cultural awareness, critical awareness and transcultural internalisation (Lussier et al. 2007). Thus, at the low level - cultural awareness

- learners display a basic understanding of the differences in beliefs, attitudes and values across cultures. So far, the assessment of the attitudinal dimension of ICC has been limited to this sub-dimension only, but teachers need to go beyond the first level of *savoir être*. At the medium level, the learners demonstrate openness, interpreting critically their own cultural identities, and accepting the fact that other cultures may have different beliefs and values. At the high level of proficiency, students are able to empathise with other cultural identities, trying to imagine themselves in the position of other people and so to share their beliefs and values, reshape their opinions, and integrate new cultural perspectives. The learners are able to take the role of mediators in situations of tension, or cultural misunderstanding.

IV. Assessing intercultural communicative competence through “Mirrors and Windows”

The present article does not intend to make a survey of all assessment tools but rather to give some examples of how ICC may be assessed in a real classroom situation. The proposed assessment tasks are based upon “Mirrors and Windows: An Intercultural Communication Textbook” (Huber-Kriegler et al. 2003), which can be employed in upper-intermediate and advanced language development classes as well as foreign language teacher training courses.

The assessment of ICC starts with gathering initial information on the students’ intercultural experiences and background knowledge (pre-testing). For that purpose, two assessment tools - the culture log and the profile diagram - are proposed (Lussier et al. 2007). The culture log is a journal in which students record their ideas and cultural facts at regular intervals (before starting a course, during a course, and at the end of the course) to keep track of their progress and of any changes in their attitudes towards other cultures. The culture log comprises notes on the following: cultural background, human life style, societal systems, religious influences, intercultural and linguistic experience. The profile diagram refers to the students’ self-evaluation of their attitudes towards other cultures at five levels of perception, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. In addition, before starting a unit in the book, for example, Unit 5: “All You Need is Love”, a survey into students’ attitudes to love-related situations across cultures is carried out with the aim of revealing their perceptions in this respect.

During the learning process, the students are asked to use a portfolio, in which they keep evidence of their progress in the development of ICC. The portfolio contains their personal observations, reflective essays regarding intercultural situations experienced by them, audio or video recordings of the interviews conducted, self-evaluation profiles and culture logs. The portfolio provides continuous assessment of the students’ performance according to the criteria specified in the evaluation grids for *savoirs*, *savoir faire* and *savoir être*.

At the end of a lesson unit, the teacher may need to know the different types of knowledge acquired by students (Lussier et al. 2007). Therefore, all three dimensions of ICC may be assessed separately, in pairs or all together. Since

each dimension covers a different aspect of learning, there will be a variety of assessment tools to evaluate students as efficiently as possible.

IV.1. Assessing savoirs

The assessment of savoirs involves students in justifying, comparing, explaining, organising, analysing, appreciating and synthesising cultural facts (Lussier et al. 2007). An example of an assessment task will follow:

Context

From the following list of proverbs, select three that can apply to your country, add one that is specific to your own culture:

Love does wonders, but money makes marriages (French proverb)

Absence sharpens love; presence strengthens it (English proverb)

Love has produced some heroes but even more idiots (Swedish proverb)

Task

In writing, describe cultural facts that are related to love, as understood by the proverbs. Explain what conception of love is reflected. How is this similar or different from your own culture?

(high level of intercultural proficiency)

IV.2. Assessing savoir faire

The assessment of savoir faire is mostly based upon role playing, simulations, case studies, or problem-solving of critical incidents in which students are required to discuss, debate, solve problems and play roles in pairs or small groups of three or four (Lussier et al, 2007). An example of an assessment task is as follows:

Context

Your friends from the Middle East are baffled by the number of commercials featuring half-naked bodies.

Task

Act out a role play.

Student A explains why it is a successful selling strategy in most Western countries to have such advertisements, by listing at least three convincing arguments.

Student B expresses his/her surprise and lists at least three arguments against having such advertisements.

During the role playing, the assessor makes notes on the linguistic appropriacy of the message, and observes: a) whether or not the student adjusts his/her responses to the input of the interlocutor (low level); b) whether the student uses different strategies to react appropriately to the input (medium level); and c) whether the student takes into account the interlocutor's culture, and is able to cope with the conflicting situation (high level).

IV.3. Assessing savoir être

The assessment of intercultural being relies upon reflective essays, critical

incidents or visual literacy tasks (pictures, posters), which aim at evaluating students' perceptions of the value systems of different cultures. An example of an assessment task is as follows:

Context

You have just attended a wedding ceremony of friends from a different religion and cultural background.

Task

Write an essay (in no more than 250 words) about a traditional wedding ceremony in your country, comparing it with another culture which surprises or confuses you, giving convincing arguments (high level of intercultural proficiency).

At the end of the teaching course, the same methods used at the end of a lesson unit can be repeated in terms of *savoirs* and *savoir faire*. For assessing *savoir être*, the methods used before starting the learning phase, such as the culture log, the profile diagram, and the portfolio, may be repeated for post-testing purposes (Lussier et al. 2007).

V. Conclusion

When assessing ICC, the teacher invariably becomes an observer of the intercultural learning process rather than of its end product. Therefore, standardised tests based on a norm, and grading learners with a mark and score as a result of indirect testing, lose their relevance here. By contrast, the teacher has to rely upon alternative assessment tools, such as self-evaluation reports, portfolios, observation checklists of the intercultural learning process and of students' progress. For these reasons, the main purpose of ICC assessment is to give teachers, as well as students, an estimation of the intercultural learning, based upon concrete descriptors and criteria of performance, which are categorised in terms of low, medium and high profile.

The abovementioned does not pretend to be a thorough analysis of the present status of ICC assessment, but rather it intends to give a sampling of ideas on how ICC can be assessed in a real classroom situation, and to suggest that this is a field which deserves further research.

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