
Dealing with Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Foreign Language Classroom

Maria José Coperías Aguilar
Universitat de València, Spain

4.1 Communicative Competence and the Native Speaker

In the 1970s Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence (CC) when he argued that, in order to understand first language acquisition, it was necessary to take into account not only how grammatical competence but also the ability to use language appropriately were acquired, thus placing emphasis on sociolinguistic competence among native speakers. This idea was taken up by Canale and Swain (1980) in North America and Van Ek (1986) in Europe, who applied it to foreign language acquisition and turned it into a fundamental concept in the development of communicative language teaching. The aim of communicative methodology was to acquire the necessary skills to communicate in socially and culturally appropriate ways, and, in the learning process, focus was placed on functions, role playing and real situations, among other aspects.

Canale and Swain (1980) proposed that communicative competence was minimally composed of grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence (1980: 27–31):

- *Grammatical competence* includes the knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence grammar semantics, and phonology.
- *Sociolinguistic competence* is made up of two different sets of rules: sociocultural and discourse. The former focuses on the extent to which certain propositions and communicative functions are appropriate within a given sociocultural context, and the extent to which appropriate attitude and register or style are conveyed by a particular grammatical form within a given sociocultural context. Rules of discourse are concerned with cohesion and coherence of groups of utterances.

- Finally, *strategic competence* is made up of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that the speaker may resort to when breakdowns in communication take place due to performance variables or to insufficient competence. These strategies may relate to grammatical competence (how to paraphrase, how to simplify, etc.) or to sociolinguistic competence (for instance, how to address strangers when unsure of their social status).

At the same time, they insisted on the need to establish communicative interaction with “highly competent speakers” of the language so that learners would be able to respond to genuine communicative needs in realistic second language situations. On the other hand, they also proposed that learners should be taught about the second language culture in order to provide them with the sociocultural knowledge of the second language necessary to infer the social meanings or values of utterances.

A few years later, Van Ek (1986) suggested that foreign language (FL) teaching was not concerned merely with training in communication skills but should also involve the personal and social development of the learner as an individual, and, therefore, he presented a framework for comprehensive FL objectives which included aspects such as social competence, the promotion of autonomy or the development of social responsibility (1986: 33–65), quoted by Byram (1997: 9). The model he presented contemplated six dimensions of CC, each of them called competence also. In fact, they are six points of view of a complex phenomenon, which overlap and are mutually dependent:

- *Linguistic competence*: The ability to produce and interpret meaningful utterances which are formed in accordance with the rules of the language concerned and bear their conventional meaning ... that meaning which native speakers would normally attach to an utterance when used in isolation.
- *Sociolinguistic competence*: The awareness of ways in which the choice of language forms ... is determined by such conditions as setting, relationship between communication partners, communicative intention, etc. ... [this] competence covers the relation between linguistic signals and their contextual –or situational– meaning.
- *Discourse competence*: The ability to use appropriate strategies in the construction and interpretation of texts.
- *Strategic competence*: When communication is difficult we have to find ways of ‘getting our meaning across’ or ‘finding out what somebody means’; these are communication strategies, such as rephrasing, asking for clarification.

- *Sociocultural competence*: Every language is situated in a sociocultural context and implies the use of a particular reference frame which is partly different from that of the foreign language learner; socio-cultural competence presupposes a certain degree of familiarity with that context.
- *Social competence*: Involves both the will and the skill to interact with others, involving motivation, attitude, self confidence, empathy and the ability to handle social situations.

Both proposals are very similar except for the incorporation by Van Ek (1986) of two¹ more points of view, *sociocultural* and *social competence*, which take into account values and beliefs, on the one hand, and attitudes and behaviours, on the other.

The native speaker (NS) as a model is implicit in both the linguistic and the sociolinguistic competences and the idea that the language presented in the classroom should be as authentic as possible, so as to represent the reality of NS language use, has been one of the tenets of the communicative approach (Alptekin 2002: 61). Even as regards sociocultural competence, the tendency is to consider the learner as an imperfect NS, who does not manage to assume the appropriate body language, intonation or even life view. This dependency on the NS has been precisely one of the reasons given by several authors to challenge the concept of CC. The problem with taking the NS as a model is that he becomes an impossible target for the learner, who will inevitably end up frustrated. As Cook (1999) has put it, “the prominence of the native speaker in language teaching has obscured the distinctive nature of the successful L2 user and created an unattainable goal for L2 learners” (1999: 185). Even in the case that the learner should manage to acquire this degree of perfection, it might not be the correct kind of competence as it would mean that the learner has to abandon one language in order to blend into another linguistic environment, thus becoming linguistically schizophrenic (Byram 1997: 11). It also means that the learner’s native language is completely left aside in the process of learning an FL, when it could be usefully introduced to give confidence to the student and trigger interest in some topics or aspects to be dealt with in the classroom.

Although, as we have said above, Canale and Swain (1980) hinted at the idea of supplementing the students’ instruction with a smattering of the culture attached to the language being learnt in order to provide them with the necessary background to infer social meanings, the fact is that communicative methodology is focused on functional uses of language and the mere acquisition of communication skills. After some years of communicative euphoria, though, some teachers felt the need to introduce

a humanistic and a cultural approach to the teaching of an FL (Aarup Jensen 1995: 30; Kramersch 1995: 83). However, in agreement with the idea of the NS as a model for the linguistic and sociolinguistic competence, the cultural aspects usually taken into account are also those of the target language, leaving the learner's own culture in a peripheral position or even completely ignored (Alptekin 2002: 62), a shortcoming –along with the need to introduce emotional aspects, which are so important in the contact with a foreign language– that has also been pointed out by other authors (Oliveras Vilaseca 2000: 34).

4.2 The Intercultural Speaker

We should not forget, though, that on growing up we are all subject to socialization, that is to say, the process of acquiring adult roles, internalizing the beliefs and values of a specific society or group. Socialization is therefore clearly linked to cultural transmission and it mostly takes place through the medium of language; at the same time, we are also socialized into ways of using language (Cortazzi 1990: 56–57). This means we have acquired certain frameworks of assumptions, ideas and beliefs that we use to interpret other people's behaviour and where most of our experiences fit. We are so familiar with our own culture that we do not even realize it is there and, inevitably, it influences our expectations when we establish contact with people belonging to a different culture. This is even more so when it comes to the learning of an FL, where a process of acculturation² takes place, leading learners to acquire new cultural frames of reference and probably a new world view in agreement with those of the target culture. Most often, the learners' cultural experience will influence their expectations of the second language and culture as well as the learning process. Driven by ethnocentrism, we tend to take as "normal" what we know, what we are familiar with, and when confronted with new situations we may lose footing. The clash of the two cultures, the learner's own and the one related to the language to be acquired, may range from total acceptance or assimilation to complete rejection. Students may freely accept the new frames of reference or even be already familiar with them if we speak about a language like English and the global cultural domination attached to it by means of the media (basically cinema, music and advertising). On the other hand, they may have developed some stereotypes about the new culture which prevent acceptance or even provoke rejection of the new culture and maybe the language.

At the same time, it has usually been thought that the aim of learning an FL was to be able to communicate with its NSs or to become familiar with some aspects of its culture, for instance, literature but, as experience shows, this is not necessarily the case. Regarding language, we may find several communicative situations: participants with different languages and nationalities where only one of them is an NS; participants with different languages and nationalities where neither of them is an NS, as they are using a specific language as a *lingua franca*; and even participants with the same nationality but different mother tongues where only one of them is an NS of the language used (Byram 1997: 22). As for culture, in our present world learners of an FL will find themselves more and more often in situations where they have to understand the relationships between different cultures and will have to make sense of different behaviours and attitudes, they will have to become mediators trying to interpret and connect two or several ways of understanding the world (Byram 1995: 54). And this is so because we are living in a complex world with new requirements concerning linguistic and cultural qualifications in people: we have to be able to deal with this complexity, both productively and receptively, at local level or in a micro-context –home, the work place or school– and also in global situations or macro-contexts –international meetings or the Internet (Risager 2000: 15; Jæger 2001: 54). Such learners need to function fully in a situation where at least two languages and two cultures, their own and another one, interplay and they may find themselves in a no-man’s-land or, more exactly, in a “third place” from which they must understand and mediate between the home and the target language and culture (Kramsch 1993: 233–259). Learners have to become mediators who have the ability to manage communication and interaction between people of different cultural identities and languages, coming out from their own perspective and taking up another, able to handle different interpretations of reality, persons who have a privileged position between the home and the target culture, that is to say, learners must become intercultural speakers (IS).

Consequently, the NS as a reference point for the FL learner should be replaced by the IS, as was already proposed by Byram and Zarate in 1994. It is true that an IS will most probably be less skilled than an NS regarding the mastery of the language³. But it is also true that the former is at a privileged vantage point regarding communication abilities and interaction with people from other cultures and with other languages. Replacing the NS with the IS, though, should not be understood as lowering the standards of achievement expected of the FL learner (Steele 1996: 77). It seems that the IS is in a more relaxed position since it is now allowed to retain one’s social, linguistic and cultural baggage; however, the IS is a

dynamic concept with no specific goal or limits and the learner must always be ready to acquire more knowledge and more abilities (Jæger 2001: 53).

4.3 Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Foreign Language Classroom

If the NS is no longer suitable as a model for the FL learner, CC is probably not the most appropriate approach either. According to Byram (1997), when persons from different languages and/or countries interact socially they bring to the situation their knowledge about their own country and that of the others'. Part of the success of such interaction will depend on the establishing and maintenance of human relationships, something which depends on attitudinal factors. At the same time, both aspects, knowledge and attitude, are influenced by the processes of intercultural communication, that is to say, the skills of interpretation and establishing relationships between aspects of the two cultures and the skills of discovery and interaction. Finally, all these factors should be integrated within a philosophy of political education and develop the learners' critical cultural awareness of all the cultures involved (1997: 32–33). Byram presents these factors as *savoirs* to be acquired or developed by the learner, the future IS:

- *savoir être*, which is concerned with attitudes and values and consists in showing curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own;
- *savoirs*, which refers to the knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction;
- *savoir comprendre*, related to the skills of interpreting and relating, that is to say, the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own;
- *savoir apprendre/faire*, connected to the skills of discovery and interaction or the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction;
- *savoir s'engager*, in relation to critical cultural awareness and/or political education, which means having the ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries (Byram 1995: 57–66, Byram 1997: 31–54).

In fact, what the learner would be acquiring would be intercultural competence (IC) or intercultural communicative competence (ICC). When defining the different *savoirs*, no linguistic aspects have been mentioned and all the focus has been on culture and the relationship between cultures, that is to say, interculturality. We should not forget, though, that interculturality means interaction, and interaction is communication, that is to say, language of one kind or another. In any case, Byram (1997: 70–71) introduces the possibility of distinguishing between both competences: in IC, individuals have the ability to interact in their own language with people from another country and culture, drawing upon their knowledge about intercultural communication, their attitudes of interest in otherness and their skills in interpreting, relating and discovering; whereas in ICC, interaction takes place between people from different cultures and countries in an FL, the knowledge of the participants of another culture is linked to their language competence through their ability to use language appropriately and their awareness of the specific meaning, values and connotations of the language. Therefore IC can and should be acquired by people from all walks of life and involved in any kind of trade; however, when dealing with FL teaching and learning, it is ICC that we must aim at, as the focus is mostly on linguistic aspects and, in this context, “communicative” is normally identified with “linguistic” (Risager 2000: 14).

4.3.1 Implementation of ICC in the Curriculum

Does ICC mean that we have to use a new methodology in the classroom, as happened when the communicative approach was adopted? Some authors (Byram et al. 2002: 7; Corbett 2003: 14) defend the idea that introducing the intercultural approach in our classrooms does not mean introducing new methods, and we can still use many of the practices well known to many FL teachers such as role-play, projects or co-operative goal-directed activities; the differences will lie in the role given to language in the construction of identities and to the understanding and mediation of cultural differences. However, some other authors have also shown the objections made by some teaching practitioners about the impossibility of introducing new aspects or new contents in an already very busy curriculum (Müller 1995: 61) or the debate about whether IC should be developed as an integral part of the language learning syllabus and into what kind of course it should be integrated: grammar, literature, topic-based or a mixture of them all (Mughan 1999: 63–64). Byram (1997: 64) also echoes some of the objections about making IC compatible with FL classroom work as usually conceived and points out how teachers with

a more literary oriented training would probably be more willing to adopt this approach as they may find analogies in the skills of interpreting and discovering with the traditions of some approaches to literature.

Despite some of these objections, the interest of the educational institutions and authorities of different countries in intercultural aspects to be present in their FL teaching curricula has been evident since the late 1980s. In 1989, the guidelines issued by the Japanese Government for junior secondary school stated that one of the basic aims of its educational policy was “to place importance on deepening international understanding and developing an attitude of respect for our country’s culture and traditions” (quoted by Parmenter and Tomita 2001: 133), although some contradictions have been experienced in their implementation (*ibid.* 134). In 1990, a document called *Modern Foreign Languages for Ages 11–16: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales*, which applied to England and Wales, established that the purposes of FL teaching were:

- to offer insights into the culture and civilisation of the countries where the language is spoken;
- to encourage positive attitudes to foreign language learning and to speakers of foreign languages and a sympathetic approach to other cultures and civilisations; and
- to develop pupils’ understanding of themselves and their own culture (quoted by Byram et al. 1994: 15).

Another document published in 2000 (*The National Curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages*) continued to stress the importance of learning modern FLs by stating that “through the study of a foreign language, pupils understand and appreciate different countries, cultures, people and communities –and as they do so, begin to think of themselves as citizens of the world as well as of the United Kingdom” (quoted by Dodd 2001: 163), and some of the aspects to be acquired include: knowledge and understanding of the target language, language skills and cultural awareness. The educational law developed by the Spanish authorities between 1990 and 1991 established that students, apart from being able to understand and produce oral and written messages appropriately in their own language as well as in an FL, should also learn to relate with other persons and take part in group activities with tolerant attitudes, overcoming prejudices. This law specifically values the presence of FLs in the curriculum as their knowledge is a necessary condition to facilitate intercultural understanding in a world increasingly open to all kinds of international relationships, and it will

allow students to expand the field of interpersonal relationships, contributing to the students' socialization process.

The Danish education act of 1995 follows very similar lines in the sense that, apart from the teaching of the language skills proper, it establishes that "the teaching shall create a framework for experience, insight and co-operation and shall strengthen pupils' active participation ... [it] shall give pupils insight into cultural and social conditions in English-speaking countries and thus strengthen their international understanding and their understanding of their own culture⁴" (quoted by Aktor and Risager 2001: 220–221). The authors of the report *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (1996) in the United States opened it by saying that "Language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are equipped linguistically and culturally to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad" (quoted by Carel 2001: 146), thus making obvious the aims of FL teaching, although they have been considered unrealistic by some teachers at different levels of education. More recently, other countries have also expressed their concern about these issues, and the Polish Ministry of Education, in a document published in 2002, stated that FL teaching in upper secondary schools should, among other things, enrich the cultural component with issues related to European integration and foster attitudes of curiosity, openness and tolerance towards other cultures in students (Bandura 2003: 1).

As we can observe, the Polish curriculum talks about "European integration", which is the aim towards which the Council of Europe has been working for years. One of the main concerns regarding integration is obviously languages, as a consequence of both diversity and the "monolingual" tendency towards the use of English as a *lingua franca*. After years of debate, in 1996 the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEF) was issued, a guideline to describe achievements of learners of FLs across Europe with the aim to provide a method of assessing and teaching which can be applied to all languages in Europe. The CEF (1996) deals in one of its chapters with the competences the learner must acquire, which are divided into general and communicative. In the former group, intercultural awareness is one of the items included, which is referred to in the following terms: "Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation ... between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of the target community' produce an intercultural awareness. ... It is also enriched by awareness of a wider range of cultures than those carried by the learner's L1 and L2" (CEF 1996: 103).

Either impelled by the guidelines issued by their different governments or by their own desire to innovate and improve their teaching practices,

many FL teachers throughout Europe have shown an increasing interest in and a will to introduce an intercultural approach in their classes, as has been proved by two different surveys carried out as part of wider projects⁵. We are not going into the results of these surveys in detail, but we would like to comment broadly on some aspects. In both surveys, the respondents answered in favour of introducing the cultural dimension in FL teaching and recognised the important role of ICC for communication in an FL and that it should be given more emphasis in the language classroom. At the same time, they tried to create as many opportunities as possible for their students to understand and experience other cultures by means of the textbook, videos, films, press articles, inviting native-speaking guests or even promoting exchange programmes. This interest, however, contrasted with another part of the answers: when asked about the curriculum contents, they recognised that, in general, they still attach much more importance to the teaching of the language itself than to the teaching of cultural aspects, reaching results of 80% and 20%, respectively, in many cases. On top of this, when asked about the cultural contents they considered most important in teaching an FL, issues like traditions and customs, history, geography or political conditions appeared in top positions, and other aspects more closely connected to what we should understand as ICC –developing attitudes of openness and tolerance towards other peoples and cultures, promoting the ability to handle intercultural contact situations, promoting reflection on cultural differences or promoting increased understanding of the students’ own culture– came in lower positions. It is evident, then, that a lot remains to be done.

4.3.2 The Changing Role of Teachers and Students

We said above that ICC did not consist in a new methodology, but it is true that its implementation as the goal of FL teaching will depend on the attitude and the training of the teachers in these aspects. According to the results of the surveys we have just mentioned, it seems that the attitude is there, so maybe there is something wrong with the training. In one of those surveys, teachers were asked if they had received any intercultural communication training and all of them answered that, although some aspects of IC might be implicitly included in subjects dealing with civilisation, sociolinguistics, literature, history, etc., they had not studied IC in a systematic way (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich et al. 2003: 10). As we explained before, ICC goes beyond the concept of language learning as just acquiring skills in a language, accompanied by some factual knowledge about a country where the language is spoken. The teacher now

becomes a mediator that has to give priority not to the amount of knowledge to be acquired but to the development of new attitudes, skills and critical awareness in the student. That is to say, the task of the teacher is not to provide comprehensive information or bring the foreign society into the classroom for learners to observe and experience but to develop in students the competence that will make them relativise their own cultural values, beliefs and behaviours and investigate for themselves the otherness, what is different to their “norm” (Byram et al. 2002: 13–33; Byram et al. 2001: 3). Consequently, in this context non-native teachers become particularly valued for their ability to move between the home and target cultures (Corbett 2003: 12), although, obviously a curious, open-minded native teacher, especially if widely-travelled, can be equally or better valued. In fact, the best teacher will be neither the native nor the non-native speaker, but the person who can make students see the connections between their own and other cultures, as well as awaken their curiosity about difference and otherness.

If in ICC what is important is not the amount of knowledge transmitted, but the attitudes, skills and critical awareness that learners develop, we have to understand that the learners become the centre of the teaching and learning process. In the process of ICC acquisition, Byram (1997: 64–73) distinguishes three locations: classroom, fieldwork and independent learning, each with a different degree of teacher-student interaction; in the classroom the participation of the teacher is higher, although it can also range through different degrees; in fieldwork it is reduced to the role of a mere supervisor and in independent learning⁶, even if the teacher may act as a tutor or guide, the full responsibility is the student’s. The figure of the teacher, however, never disappears completely, as the learning process in order to be more beneficial cannot be a random activity but has to be scheduled, and the achievements, sooner or later, have to be assessed. This idea of “sharing the power” with students is at the heart of Coffey’s (1999) proposal of building cultural community in FL learning curricula. For her, building cultural community means fostering meaningful communication among all group members when they do not share a common worldview. In order to do this, apart from sharing power with our students, we have to encourage them to be tolerant of ambiguity, foster empathy as well as cooperation and build an understanding of cultural values; as we can see, all these aims are completely in agreement with those of ICC. Many other authors (Steele 1996: 79; Jæger 2001: 53; Cesevičiūtė and Minkutė-Henrickson 2002: 55) also share the idea that the primary role of the teacher in ICC is to develop students’ autonomous and independent learning skills and that learner-centred pedagogy is the most effective way of teaching an FL.

Several authors have defended the idea that one of the best ways to develop ICC in general and autonomy in particular in FL learning is by introducing ethnographic skills⁷. Technically speaking, ethnography refers to an anthropologist's description of a community through systematic observation, usually by living among the community as a participant observer over a period of time (Corbett 2003: 9). One of their fields of work is description of language behaviour within the community, but in later years ethnography has widened its scope and includes a variety of research techniques in the media, cultural studies as well as other areas. The idea is not that students become professional anthropologists, but some training in ethnographic techniques –the introduction of discovery skills– can benefit the language learning process as students learn via observation and the gathering of data. The ethnographic approach matches many of the goals of communicative language teaching by seeking:

- an integration of linguistic and cultural learning to facilitate communication and interaction;
- a comparison of others and self to stimulate reflection on and (critical) questioning of the mainstream culture into which learners are socialised;
- a shift in perspective involving psychological processes of socialisation;
- the potential of language teaching to prepare learners to meet and communicate in other cultures and societies than the specific one usually associated with the language they are learning. (Byram and Fleming 1998: 7, as quoted by Corbett 2003: 35).

Of course, the ethnographic activities have to be adapted to the purpose and the level of the FL learning classroom. The book *Developing Intercultural Competence in Practice* (Byram et al. 2001), “a forum for reflection on the experience and practice of learning and teaching languages and intercultural competence” (vii), contains several experiences carried out by teachers in different parts of the world, most of which have an ethnographic component where students have to collect information on a specific topic by means of research, interviews or mere observation of events or social and cultural products. This is what is often referred to as *fieldwork*. The data gathered will be presented and exploited in the classroom in different ways so that the students can improve both their language and intercultural competence. Most experiences presented in the book also prove that ethnographic activities can be used with students belonging to a wide range of ages, from young children to adults; a variety of cultural backgrounds, from barely literate people to university

students; and a diversity of national origins: students from just one country, students from two countries working in partnership or immigrants from different countries working together. Something else these experiences showed is that there is enough material to work on our doorstep as almost any element around us is apt to be used in order to trigger our curiosity and the development of our ICC. In fact, almost all the textbooks and material we are going to deal with in the following section contain activities with an ethnographic approach.

4.3.3 Textbooks and Teaching Material

At the beginning of this chapter we expressed some of the problems that taking the NS as a model presented for the FL learner. Part of the problem lies in the fact that this is the model that most teaching material follows. Alptekin (2002: 61) criticizes the fact that corpus descriptions of English⁸ contain databases of NS usage, influencing model situations in coursebooks, which involve mostly interactions of NS with NS, excluding almost completely interactions between NS and non-native speaker (NNS) or between NNSs. At the same time, an idealized image of the English-speaking country is portrayed, thus perpetuating a number of stereotypes. And as has been pointed out by some authors (Clarke and Clarke 1990: 35), stereotypical representations in textbooks can be doubly dishonest in the sense that they generally omit aspects such as linguistic and ethnic diversity or class and gender oppositions, thus transmitting the idea of perfect societies to foreign recipients, in contrast with their own, which they experience as imperfect.

As regards teaching materials, it will also be useful to distinguish between what Cortazzi and Jin (1999: 196) have called *cultural content* and *culture of learning*, which refers to a series of dynamic processes, including the very act of teaching and learning: what kinds of interactions are appropriate in class⁹, how texts should be used, etc. In the last decades several checklists have been elaborated in order to measure the cultural contents of textbooks¹⁰. The most recent and complete one we know about is the result of a pilot study carried out by members of one of the networks of the abovementioned Project 1.2.3. coordinated by the ECML in Graz. Here the evaluators took into account not just the cultural contents of the teaching material, but also aspects like the correspondence between the aims and goals of the materials and the students' conceptual framework, needs and goals and the presentation of the contents through cultural knowledge and attitudinal, intercultural and culture-and-language perspectives. The results of the questionnaires and interviews and their consequent analysis have been

summarized in a series of strengths and weaknesses (Skopinskaja 2003: 52). The positive trends are: an increase in attempts to include, on the one hand, intercultural activities and, on the other, serious social issues; an attempt to personalise the FL learning process by providing opportunities for exchanges of views; and the inclusion of a wider range of both accents and voices and genres and text types. However, still manifest are the subordination of the goal of culture teaching to other goals and the as yet excessive focus on language form with detriment to intercultural communication; the Anglo-centric focus of coursebooks; and the stereotypical representation of both the target and the student's culture.

As pointed out by Cortazzi and Jin (1999: 199–201), the textbook in itself can represent many things ranging from the, in our opinion, most harmful ones: authority or ideology, to others more beneficial as, for instance, a map or a resource. The book is just an object, although often a very useful one, that has to be skilfully used by both the teacher and the students. First of all, textbooks should be challenged: language is always value-laden and therefore texts are never neutral, a “simple” grammar exercise can reinforce prejudice and stereotypes by means, for instance, of the vocabulary used or the pronouns chosen. Critical discourse analysis, which studies the way text and talk may reproduce or resist racism, abuse of social power, dominance and inequality, comes in very handy here, and several authors (Gray 2000: 281; Risager 2000: 17; Byram et al. 2002: 24, 27–28; Corbett 2003: 13) encourage both teachers and learners to apply it to the contents of textbooks. Once the textbook has been challenged and the shortcomings, as well as the advantages, have been spotted, it is the teacher's turn to act as a mediator: parts of the book can be adapted, new material can be supplemented, the account of a personal experience can be presented, and ethnocentric approaches or images can in fact be turned around and used as a pretext for intercultural activities.

In the previous paragraphs, we have spoken about the target culture and the “idealized image of the English-speaking country”, but when dealing with the culture associated to a language and more specifically in the case of English, which culture or which English-speaking country do we mean? Traditionally it has been British or American culture but, on the one hand, there are several other English-speaking countries and, on the other, in the last decades English has become an international language or a *lingua franca* which not always represents the mother tongue of either speaker. There are arguments to reject either representation in textbooks: if the textbook only represents the target culture its very strangeness and detachment may provoke rejection in the student, it may create further problems if this representation is on top of everything stereotyped and “ideal”; and when books try to include

representations of several cultures, either related to the target language or not, the result may be unconnected topics and issues that eventually make no sense. A third possibility is to set textbooks in the learner's own country but, as has been shown by Clarke and Clarke (1990: 36), if the target culture is removed or just presented in partial, stereotypical glimpses, the effect can be one of distortion. In fact, an attempt should be made to find a position that takes into account all three stances, that is to say, an intercultural approach. A real representation of the society and an account of some historical and cultural aspects of the countries where the FL is spoken originally can help learners to understand better language structures, predominant vocabulary, idioms or the status of that language in the world. However, it is necessary to introduce elements of the learner's own culture, as well as other cultures, so that by means of contrast and comparison an openness of mind and a reflection on the relativity of their acquired values can be fostered in the learners. At the same time, rather than reflecting a specific culture, textbooks should help to develop discovery skills that will allow students to get the information necessary in each situation, not only during the learning period but also in future. The combination of all these elements should be the development of critical cultural awareness.

The position most strongly defended by experts at the moment is that rather than producing textbooks for the international market, teaching materials should be addressed to particular communities and become more involved with country-specific publishing (Corbett 2003: 212; Pulverness 2004: 7). This also seems to be the position of two important institutions related to the field of FL teaching, the ECML, dependent on the Council of Europe, and the British Council, that have been working along these lines. Due to its inherent characteristics, the Council of Europe or the ECML develop a wide range of activities and studies aimed at the defence of multiculturalism and multilingualism all over Europe. One example of the efforts made to develop understanding would be the publication promoted by the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe *All different, all equal*, which is an education pack including resources and activities for intercultural education with young people and adults¹¹. Well-reputed scholars like Van Ek or the so often quoted in this article Byram have carried out important work to establish guidelines that will help to spread real intercultural communication throughout Europe. Byram's model for ICC is at the basis of the previously mentioned Project 1.2.3. supported by the ECML, one of whose results is the publication of *Mirrors and windows. An intercultural communication textbook*, a book "aimed at teacher trainers, teacher trainees [or] secondary school teachers of any subject" and that "can be used ... as a practical coursebook on intercultural communication, or as supplementary

material in language development” (Huber-Kriegler et al. 2003: 9). Although the book is written in English, it can be adapted for learners and speakers of other languages too and includes elements from different cultures.

The British Council, even though its undeniable aim is to spread English language and British culture, has been working in close collaboration with teachers of mainly Central and Eastern European countries in order to develop materials which show and put in connection both British and these other cultures. Three of the most interesting examples¹² are *Zoom In*, *Branching out* and *Changing Skies*. The first book is focused on Hungarian and British societies and is the result of a study trip to the South West of England by some Hungarian teachers, who used the authentic material (photographs, audio and video recordings) gathered there, as well as their experiences, to write a book to develop knowledge, attitudes, skills and critical awareness in students. *Branching out*, was the result of the experience of about sixty teachers working in Bulgarian secondary schools in a project coordinated by Davcheva and Docheva (1998), with the support of Pulverness (2001). Unlike *Zoom In*, which could not easily be used outside Hungary, *Branching out*, although drawing on Bulgarian culture, has a wider scope and the activities proposed could be transposed to any other country. Even though it can be used as a textbook, we consider it a collection of very interesting activities aimed at developing ICC. Pulverness’s (2001) *Changing Skies* is in our opinion an excellent example of ICC in its broader sense: the improvement of the learner’s proficiency in English language and the development of intercultural skills by means of a series of well devised and organised exercises and activities. As the subtitle indicates, it is a “European course for advanced level learners” and therefore skilfully draws on elements from different European countries.

Although we do not have the time or the space to go into the work of American scholars in favour of the development of ICC, we would like to mention just a couple of books: Seelye’s (1987) *Teaching Culture. Strategies for Intercultural Communication*, a classic originally published in 1984 with many re-editions, and Fantini’s (1997) more recent book *New Ways in Teaching culture*, an anthology of suggested lesson ideas for integrating language and culture.

4.4 Conclusion

Several authors (Mughan 1999: 62; Oliveras Vilaseca 2000: 29–32) have pointed out that the need for IC was actually identified as early as the

1950s, when several international companies and institutions realized that, apart from language competence, their workers also needed some kind of intercultural understanding in order to make their work more effective or simply not to fail in their aims. In recent years, this need, far from disappearing, has spread to more and more areas of interaction. In one of the studies mentioned above (Aleksandrowicz-Pędicz et al. 2003: 7–37), when teachers were asked about the potential benefits of including ICC in FL teaching, both pragmatic and idealistic reasons were mentioned: the first included success in business and the tourist industry, working and travelling abroad, and coping with multicultural societies; the latter were connected with values that might contribute to a better world society, such as, acceptance and tolerance of differences, building up the spirit of the European Union and world peace in general, learning how to avoid potential conflicts and internationalism.

We should not forget that FL teaching does not consist in the mere transmission of speaking skills but is part of the whole process of education of a person in the sense of the acquisition of values, attitudes and beliefs. Due to its very nature, FL teaching offers students opportunities to get in touch with real life experience and with other cultures which are denied to other subjects. IC can and must be present in many areas of education and is in fact a life-long process that may help us to become resourceful members of our complex contemporary society; ICC also trains us as language and cultural mediators in an increasing multilingual and multicultural world. There is little to lose and quite a lot to gain with the implementation of ICC in the FL classroom independently of our pragmatic or idealistic reasons for doing so.

Notes

¹ What Canale and Swain call *sociolinguistic competence*, which they split into sociocultural and discourse rules, corresponds in fact to Van Ek's *sociolinguistic* and *discourse competence*.

² In the bibliography we have consulted the terms *enculturation* and *acculturation* are sometimes used indistinctly; however, we are following the terms as used by Berry et al., who establish that “enculturation is the process by which the group generally incorporates children into the culture and by which the child acquires the appropriate behaviors. In contrast, *acculturation* refers to cultural and psychological change brought about by contact with other peoples belonging to different cultures and exhibiting different behaviors” (1994: 19).

³ Corbett (2003: 39–40) observes how few native English speakers entirely conform to “Standard English in their output and how ironic it is that second language learners are often required institutionally to conform to standards that are more rigorous than those applied to native speakers.”

⁴ This quotation belongs to the overall aims for the teaching of English, but these are identical for the teaching of French and German.

⁵ The first project, “FL teachers’ perceptions of their role as mediators of language-and-culture: a comparative investigation in seven countries,” stemmed from an idea presented by Dr Lies Sercu at a seminar on the intercultural dimension in teaching organised by Professor Michael Byram at the School of Education University of Durham in 2000. An electronic questionnaire with 64 mostly closed questions organized in 11 sections was prepared. It was answered by 409 teachers from Belgium, Sweden, Poland, Mexico, Greece, Spain and Bulgaria; the respondents were secondary school teachers, mostly of English. The results were due to be analysed by the coordinator in each country and later published in book form; so far, we have only managed to have the results and analysis of the Polish questionnaires, which were answered by 49 teachers (Bandura 2003). The second one, Project 1.2.3., originated after a workshop on incorporating ICC in pre- and in-service language teacher training, organised by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) in Graz in April 2001. As a follow-up, four networks were set up in order to work on different areas: perception of teachers, evaluation of teaching materials, design of teaching materials and assessment. The results of the survey among teachers, “The views of teachers of English and French on intercultural communicative competence in language teaching,” was published by Aleksandrowicz-Pędich L et al., in Lázár, I (ed) (2003). 47 teachers of English and 15 teachers of French from Cyprus, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Greece, Malta, Iceland, Hungary, Estonia and the Netherlands answered the questionnaire.

⁶ Independent learning can be a life-long activity; however, we are taking it here as simultaneous with classroom and fieldwork, as part of the teaching-learning process while at school or university.

⁷ In the United Kingdom the introduction of ethnography into FL learning and teaching has been the result of the work of Byram and his associates, for instance, Byram 1997; Byram et al. 1994; Byram and Fleming 1998; Roberts et al. 2001.

⁸ So far, we have referred to the teaching of FLs in general without focusing on any specific language; however, due to our training and area of work, many of the aspects and examples we will deal with in this last part of the chapter are about the teaching and learning of English as an FL.

⁹ In the literature on FL teaching and learning, there are numerous examples of unfulfilled expectations in the classroom on the side of either the teacher or the students due to the fact that they come from different cultural backgrounds and ways of socialization.

¹⁰ Cortazzi and Jin (1999: 201–204) and Skopinskaja (2003: 44–46) revise some of the most relevant ones.

¹¹ A similar recent contribution is Utley’s (2004) *Intercultural Resource Pack*.

¹² Some more examples of textbooks as well as very useful bibliography and notes on materials can be found in “An Intercultural Reader”, at <http://elt.britcoun.org.pl/forum/-intereader.htm>.

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