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# Culture and Language Assessment

Angela Scarino

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## Abstract

This first entry on culture and language assessment is written at a time of much reconsideration of the major constructs in language/s learning and language assessment. This is in response at least partly to the increasingly complex reality of multilinguality and multiculturalism in our contemporary world. Culture is one of these constructs and is considered in its interrelationship with language and learning. It is because of this reconsideration that the discussion in this chapter is focused on scoping the conceptual landscape and signaling emerging rather than established lines of research. The discussion encompasses (a) the assessment of culture in the learning of languages, including recent interest in assessing intercultural practices and capabilities, and (b) the role of culture (and language), or its influence, on the assessment of learning where multiple languages are in play. The discussion considers the place of culture in conceptualizing the communicative competence and understandings of the role of culture in all learning. Developments related to the assessment of intercultural practices and capabilities in foreign language learning are described, as well as multilingual (and multicultural) assessment approaches. The assessment of capabilities beyond the linguistic poses major challenges to traditional conceptualizations and elicitation and judgment practices of assessment. This is because what is being assessed is the linguistic and cultural situatedness of students of language/s as they communicate and learn across linguistic and cultural systems. This challenges the traditional assessment paradigm and also raises important ethical issues. This conceptual and practical stretch can only extend thinking about educational assessment.

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**Introduction**

It is timely to consider culture and language assessment, as culture is a dimension that has been undergoing major reconsideration in language/s learning in the past decade (e.g., see Byrnes 2010), and yet it is underrepresented in the language assessment literature.

The discussion in this chapter will consider mainly the assessment of culture/s in the learning of language/s, including the recent interest in assessing intercultural practices and capabilities in language/s learning. This refers to how “cultural knowing” or “cultural/intercultural understanding” is assessed in the context of learning language/s. The discussion will also consider, to a lesser extent, the role of culture, or its influence, on the assessment of learning in environments where multiple languages are in play and where students are or are becoming multilingual. This aspect highlights that the process of assessing learning (of language/s or other disciplines) is itself both a cultural (and linguistic) act and that culture/s (and language/s) come into play in learning and in the assessment of learning. This is because students are linguistically and culturally situated in the linguistic and cultural systems of their primary socialization. In developing their learning and in assessment, they draw upon their own dynamic histories of experiences of knowing, being, and communicating and their own frameworks of values and dispositions. In discussing both aspects, the focus will remain specifically on education and educational assessment.

The discussion takes as a starting point the move in language/s teaching and learning, away from a monolingual and national paradigm (with the one language equals one culture equation) toward a multilingual paradigm. [For a detailed discussion, see the guest-edited volume of *The Modern Language Journal* by Claire Kramsch (MLJ, 98, 1, 2014), “Teaching foreign languages in the era of globalisation.”] It is this move that gives greater prominence to the interplay of multiple languages and with these multiple cultures, in all learning and therefore in assessment.

In a recent 25-year review of culture in the learning of foreign languages, Byram (2014), one of the most prolific writers on the role of culture in language teaching, learning, and assessment, observed that “the question of assessment remains insufficiently developed” (p. 209). Atkinson (1999) reflected on how little direct attention is given to the notion of culture in TESOL, even though “ESL teachers face it in everything they do” (p. 625). Block (2003), discussing the social turn in second language acquisition (SLA), raised questions about “a cultural turn” for SLA research. He specifically noted the difficulty involved in conceptualizing the relationship between language and culture, but also the promising work in pragmatics and in learner identity as research areas that take culture into account. Although Shohamy (2011) did not specifically address culture, she drew attention to an important dimension of the discussion when arguing for assessing “multilingual competencies” in an assessment field that continues to view language as a monolingual, homogenous, and often still native-like construct (p. 419). I add that the monolingual bias that Shohamy described in language assessment extends to it also being a *monocultural* bias.

These reflections signal some of the efforts to reconsider and expand the constructs in language teaching, learning, and assessment “beyond lingualism” (Block 2014) to include dimensions such as subjectivity and identity.

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## Early Developments

Culture comes into play in the diverse contexts of language learning and assessment, both as a dimension of the *substance* of learning (e.g., in the learning of foreign languages) and as the *medium* for learning language/s and other areas of learning (e.g., in the learning of ESL/EAL). In considering culture as substance, it is necessary to consider the relationship between language and culture. In considering culture as medium, it is necessary to consider the relationship between language and culture and learning.

## Language and Culture

The integral relationship between language/s and culture/s has long been considered from diverse disciplinary perspectives, including linguistics, anthropology, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics (Whorf 1940/1956; Sapir 1962; Geertz 2000; Gumperz and Levinson 1996; Kramsch 2004). In the diverse contexts of language/s

learning, this interrelationship is understood and foregrounded in different ways. In foreign language teaching and learning, culture has been understood traditionally as factual knowledge or as a form of “content” of language learning, with literature and other aesthetic forms as rich expressions of particular culture/s. In this sense culture is understood as observable products or artifacts, associated with a particular social group. It has also been understood as ways of life, behaviors, and actions of a social group where the language/s is used. Both of these understandings present a static view of culture that removes variability and personal agency within the national group. A more recent perspective is an understanding of culture as social norms and practices, created through the use of language (see Byrnes 2010). Such practices, however, are removed from the cultural identity of the learner as a participant in language learning. In ESL/EAL, where the major goal is to prepare students for learning in English across diverse disciplines, the interrelationship between language and culture has been backgrounded in order to focus on subject matter learning across the curriculum.

A useful starting point for a consideration of culture and language assessment is how it has been represented in the construct of “communicative competence.” This is because it is the conceptualization of the construct that guides elicitation, judging, and validation in the assessment cycle (Scarino 2010). In the conceptualization of “linguistic competence,” where the focus was on the linguistic system itself, there was an absence of any attention to culture or to language users as participants in the linguistic and cultural system. Canale and Swain’s (1980) framework comprised grammatical competence (vocabulary and rules of grammar), sociolinguistic competence (conventions of use), discourse competence (cohesion and coherence of texts), and strategic competence (compensating for limited resources in using language). This modeling highlighted the social, interactive nature of language use and the crucial role of context. The sociolinguistic interest here was with how the social context affects choices within the linguistic system. Halliday’s theoretical work is instructive in this regard.

Halliday (1999) used the theoretical constructs “context of situation” and “context of culture” to explain what is entailed in an exchange of meanings in communication. In Halliday’s terms, these two constructs do not refer to “culture” in the sense of lifestyles, beliefs, and value systems of a language community (e.g., as in traditional foreign language learning) but rather as a system of meanings. He makes clear that the two constructs are not two different things, but rather that they are the same thing seen from two different depths of observation. The “situation” provides the context for particular instances of language use, and, as such, it is an instance of the larger system, which is referred to as “culture.” For Halliday, culture is in the very grammar that participants use in exchange.

Bachman and Palmer (1996, 2010) built on the Canale and Swain model by identifying “knowledge” in the mind of the user, which can be drawn upon in communication. They identified (a) organizational knowledge, that is, grammatical knowledge and textual knowledge, and (b) pragmatic knowledge, that is, functional and sociolinguistic knowledge. Pragmatic knowledge is understood as objective

knowledge that is necessary for selecting language appropriately for use in particular social situations. As such, it represented a static view of the context of situation and of participants in that context. Although this is recognized as the most developed model of “communicative ability” for the purposes of assessment, it has been criticized because of its individualistic view of social interaction (McNamara and Roever 2006) and because context is not sufficiently taken into account (Chalhoub–Deville 2003; see also Bachman 2007). In the extensive discussion about context in defining the construct of communicative competence in language assessment, the context has been understood essentially as the context of situation, with little explicit attention to the context of culture.

The applied linguist who has most extensively theorized culture in (foreign) language learning is Claire Kramersch. In her 1986 critique of the proficiency movement as an oversimplification of human interaction, Kramersch extended the construct from communicative to “interactional competence.” She highlighted at the same time that this interaction takes place within “a cross-cultural framework” (p. 367) and that successful interaction necessitates the construction of a shared internal context or “sphere of intersubjectivity” (p. 367). This understanding of culture foreshadowed her extensive discussion of context and culture in language teaching (Kramersch 1993) and her subsequent theorization of culture as “symbolic competence” (Kramersch 2006), which I consider below (see section “[Major Contributions](#)”).

## Language, Culture, and Learning

Language and culture are integral to learning. Halliday (1993) highlighted learning itself as a process of meaning-making when he wrote:

When children learn a language, they are not simply engaging in one kind of learning among many; rather, they are learning the foundation of learning itself. The distinctive characteristic of human learning is that it is a process of meaning making – a semiotic process. (p. 94)

It is through language, in the context of situation and the context of culture, that students and teachers, in their diversity, interact to exchange knowledge, ideas, explanations, and elaborations and make sense of and exchange meaning in learning. In the learning interaction, this meaning is mediated through the lenses of the language/s and culture/s of participants’ primary socialization.

All learning, therefore, is essentially a linguistic and cultural activity. It is formed through individual learners’ prior knowledge, histories, and linguistic and cultural situatedness. It is the learner’s situatedness and the cultural framing of learning that shapes the interpretation and exchange of meanings in learning and, by extension, in the assessment of learning. This understanding is in line with cultural views of learning in education. Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) described learning as emerging from participating in practices, based on students’ linguistic and cultural–historical repertoires. Lee (2008) also discussed “the centrality of culture to . . . learning and

development” (p. 267). This understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and learning is related to the sociocultural family of theories of language learning, in which the role of culture at times remains implicit. This understanding of learning as a linguistic, social, and cultural act of meaning-making becomes important in assessment. Shohamy (2011) expressed concern with the differential performance of immigrant students, depending on whether they are assessed in the language of their primary socialization or in the language of education in their new locality. The meanings that students make and represent in learning and assessment necessarily originate in the linguistic, cultural, experiential, and historical knowledge context to which they belong. It is this relationship that underlies Shohamy’s argument for multilingual assessment (see section “[Future Directions](#)” below).

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## Major Contributions

Major contributions to the consideration of culture and language assessment have been advanced in relation to ongoing conceptualizations of the construct of communicative competence, including toward “intercultural competence,” the assessment of intercultural practices and capabilities, and multilingual approaches to assessment.

## Ongoing Conceptualization of Communicative Competence Toward “Intercultural Competence”

In more recent work, Kramersch has expanded further the constructs of communicative competence and interactional competence to what she has termed “symbolic competence” (Kramersch 2006). In her conceptualization, knowledge of and engagement with the systems of culture associated with language provide the basis for understanding the ways in which users of the language establish shared meanings, how they communicate shared ideas and values, and how they understand the world. Language constitutes and reflects the social and cultural reality that is called context. Symbolic competence foregrounds meaning-making not only as an informational exchange but as a process of exchange of cultural meaning, including its interpretive and discursive symbolic dimensions. It entails using language to negotiate and exchange meanings in context, both reciprocally with others and in individual reflection on the nature of the exchanges. Context is not fixed or given but created in interaction through the intentions, assumptions, and expectations of participants. Kramersch foregrounded not only such exchange *within* a language but also *across* languages and cultures in multilingual and multicultural contexts, and it is in this way that she elaborated foreign language learning as an intercultural endeavor that develops “intercultural competence.”

## Assessing Intercultural Competence

Perhaps because her conceptualization of culture and the intercultural in language/s learning is the most elaborated and complex, Kramsch (2009) questioned whether or not it can be assessed. She stated:

[S]ymbolic competence based on discourse would be less a collection of . . . stable knowledges and more a savviness i.e., a combination of knowledge, experience and judgment. . . Trying to test symbolic competence with the structuralist tools employed by schools. . . is bound to miss the mark. Instead, symbolic competence should be seen as the educational horizon against which to measure all learners' achievements. (p. 118)

This may well be the case within traditional testing paradigms, but it has been suggested that possibilities may be available within alternative assessment paradigms (Scarino 2010) and assessment purposes that are educational.

In considering assessment in the context of intercultural language learning, a major distinction needs to be drawn between the consideration of “intercultural understanding” in general education, where language is not foregrounded (Bennett 1986), and in language/s education, where language use and language learning are the focus.

The extensive efforts to model intercultural competence began with Byram and Zarate (1994) and Byram (1997), working under the auspices of the Council of Europe. Their conceptualization was based on a set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions called *savoirs*: *savoir apprendre*, *savoir comprendre/faire*, *savoir être*, and *savoir s'engager*. In line with the council's orientation, it was focused on an objectives-setting approach, which was analytic rather than holistic, and on defining levels of intercultural competence. Although these *savoirs* captured broad educational dimensions such as *savoir être* (knowing how to be) and *savoir s'engager* (knowing how to engage politically), the original modeling did not sufficiently foreground communication. Byram (1997) subsequently modeled “intercultural communicative competence,” incorporating the set of dimensions of the model of Canale and Swain (1981), discussed above, with the set of *savoirs* that defined intercultural competence. As with all modeling, however, the relationship among these sets of dimensions was not explained. Risager (2007) included further dimensions, which she described as “linguacultural competence,” resources, and transnational cooperation, thereby highlighting the multilingual (and multicultural) nature of communication. Sercu (2004) considered the inclusion of a “metacognitive dimension” that focuses on students monitoring their learning. Although this is a valuable dimension, Sercu did not specify that the reflective work should be focused on exploring the linguistic and cultural situatedness of participants involved in communication and learning to communicate interculturally, and how it is this situatedness that shapes the interpretation, creation, and exchange of meaning. The consideration of the intricate entailments of this intercultural capability was extended by Steffensen et al. (2014) to include timescales and identity dynamics. The focus

specifically on identity formation was also taken up by Houghton (2013), with what she refers to as *savoir se transformer*.

In conceptualizing intercultural competence (or more precisely, “interlinguistic and intercultural practices and capabilities”) for the purposes of assessment, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) highlighted the need to capture:

- Observation, description, analysis, and interpretation of phenomena shared when communicating and interacting
- Active engagement with the interpretation of self (intraculturality) and “other” (interculturality) in diverse contexts of exchange
- Understanding the ways in which language and culture come into play in interpreting, creating, and exchanging meaning
- The recognition and integration into communication of an understanding of self (and others) as already situated in one’s own language and culture when communicating with others
- Understanding that interpretation can occur only through the evolving frame of reference developed by each individual (pp. 130–131)

Assessment in this formulation, therefore while remaining focused on language and culture, encompasses more than language. It is at once experiential, analytic, and reflective. For Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), it includes (a) language use to communicate meanings in the context of complex linguistic and cultural diversity, with a consideration of both personal and interpersonal subjectivities, (b) analyses of what is at play in communication that is situated within particular social and realities and how language and culture come into play in the practice of meaning-making, and (c) reciprocal reflection and reflexivity in relation to self as intercultural communicator and learner.

In addition to extensive work on conceptualizing the assessment of intercultural practices and capabilities, practical work has been and continues to be undertaken to develop ways of eliciting these practices and capabilities (e.g., see, Byram 1997; Deardorff 2009; Lussier et al. 2007). Sercu (2004) attempted to develop a typology of assessment tasks including five task types: cognitive, cognitive-attitudinal, exploration, production of materials, and enactment tasks. This framework, however, does not address precisely these capture intercultural practices and capabilities.

As indicated, it is the alternative qualitative assessment paradigm, particularly within a hermeneutic perspective (Moss 2008) and inquiry approaches (Delandshere 2002), which offers the most fruitful basis for considering the assessment of these practices and capabilities in language/s learning. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013, chapter 8) discussed and illustrated ways of eliciting the meanings that learners make or accord to phenomena and experiences of language learning, and their analyses and reflections on meaning-making. The learner is positioned as performer and analyzer, as well as being reflective. An issue that remains to be considered with respect to elicitation is the complex one of integrating the performative, analytic, and reflective facets.

The area of judging is possibly the most complex of all, not only because educators hesitate to assess learner subjectivity and the realm of values and dispositions but also because of the difficulty of bringing together, in some way, the diverse facets of intercultural practices and capabilities. Although a framework for setting criteria for judging performance has been proposed (see Liddicoat and Scarino 2013, pp. 138–139), the extent to which criteria can be pre-specified or else should emerge from the specific context of the exchange still needs to be addressed.

Finally, there is not yet in the field a frame or frames of reference for making judgments of such practices and capabilities. The Council of Europe has sought to develop a scale to address this absence but efforts to date have not succeeded. This is not surprising given the complexity that this would entail. Although making judgments remains an area of uncertainty for assessors, it is not likely to be resolved by a generalizing scale.

## Multilingual Assessment Approaches

“Multilingual assessment” is a practice proposed by Shohamy (2011) that would take into account all the languages in the multilingual speaker’s repertoire as well as “multilingual functioning” (Shohamy 2011, p. 418). Given the interrelationship between language/s and culture/s discussed above, this multilingual functioning also implies *multicultural* functioning. It is useful to distinguish at least two senses of multilingual assessment. The first is multilingual in the sense that multiple languages are available to the student, even though the assessment may be conducted in multiple but independent languages. The second is multilingual in the sense that student’s performance reveals certain practices and capabilities that characterize the use of multiple languages by multilingual users as they negotiate, mediate, or facilitate communication. Although emanating from different contexts of language education and incorporating different terms, it is possible to draw some parallels between the more recent understandings of the assessment of intercultural practices and capabilities and the notion of multilingual functioning. Studies in assessment have been undertaken in relation to the first, but, although research on actual practices of multilingual speakers has been conducted, it has not been specifically in the context of assessment. Though not explicitly foregrounded, culture/s as well as language/s is at play.

Considering the first sense of “multilingual assessment,” in an 8-year system-wide study in the multilingual context of Ethiopia, Heugh et al. (2012) demonstrated the value of learning and assessment in the student’s mother tongue in bi-/trilingual teaching programs. Heugh et al. (2016) draw attention to bilingual and multilingual design of large-scale, system-wide assessments of student knowledge in two or three languages, as well as the unanticipated use, on the part of students, of their bilingual or multilingual repertoires in high-stake examinations. In the research reported by Shohamy (2011), immigrant students from the former USSR and Ethiopia, when assessed in Hebrew as the language of instruction in Israeli Jewish schools,

performed less successfully than the local, native students. Such students bring prior academic and cultural knowledge to the assessment situation, but this knowledge is not captured when the assessment is conducted in a language and culture that is different from that of their primary socialization. Furthermore, as Shohamy explained, these students naturally continue to use the linguistic and cultural resources developed prior to immigration, but their capacity to use this knowledge is not assessed. In these circumstances, the picture of their multilingual and multicultural achievements is distorted.

Cenoz and Gorter (2011) also highlighted approaches that draw on the whole linguistic repertoire of multilingual speakers. They reported on an exploratory study of students' trilingual written production in Basque, Spanish, and English in schools in the Basque Country. They focused specifically on the interaction among the three languages. The study showed that consideration of writing performance across three languages revealed similar patterns in writing skills in the three languages. They also illustrated that students use multilingual practices in creative ways and that achievement is improved when practices such as codeswitching and translanguaging are employed. These practices are linguistic and also cultural.

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## Work in Progress

At the present stage of development, work in progress tends to be in individual, small-scale studies rather than part of large-scale programs of research and development. Conceptual work on modeling intercultural (or more precisely interlinguistic and intercultural) practices and capabilities will continue, as will consideration about the assessment of multiple languages and cultures and their relationship. Equally, discussion will continue about the assessment of capabilities beyond the linguistic (such as the capability to decenter or the capability to analyze critically or self-awareness about one's own linguistic and cultural profile). The Council of Europe's continuing work on the Common European Framework of Reference will seek to include indicators of intercultural competence because of the current desire to develop scaled, quantified levels of competence in all aspects of education. The current general education project of the Council of Europe, entitled "Competences for Democratic Culture and Intercultural Dialogue" ([https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/descriptors\\_en.asp](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/descriptors_en.asp)), may contribute to this line of development. Such quantification, however, runs counter to the qualitative, descriptive orientation that capturing these practices and capabilities entails.

An increasing range of research is being undertaken with a focus on multilingual functioning, especially processes such as translanguaging (Li Wei 2014; García and Li 2014). An explicit focus on the cultural and intercultural along with the linguistic and interlinguistic may add value to these research endeavors.

Some small-scale studies provide examples of work in progress. In a longitudinal study entitled "Developing English language and intercultural learning capabilities,"

Heugh (personal communication, October 2015) is incorporating translanguaging practices in the teaching, learning, and assessment of the English language of international students. The study involves practices in which students are invited to use their knowledge and expertise in their primary language in the process of developing high-level proficiency in English. Diagnostic assessment of students' written texts in Cantonese, Putonghua, and English allows for a more nuanced understanding of students' holistic capabilities in both their primary language and English (see Heugh et al. (2016)). This work is very much in line with Shohamy's (2011) desire that assessment recognizes the legitimate use and mixing of multiple languages, for it permits multilingual students to use their full linguistic, cultural, semiotic, and knowledge repertoires to interpret and create meaning. Heugh's work is demonstrating that these Chinese-speaking students also experience enhanced metalinguistic awareness of their own linguistic, cultural, and knowledge repertoire.

At the School of Oriental and African Studies, Pizziconi and Iwasaki (personal communication, October 2015) are researching the assessment of intercultural capabilities in the teaching and learning of Japanese. This work is being undertaken in the context of the AILA Research Network on Intercultural Mediation in Language and Culture Teaching and Learning. The project follows the development of linguistic and intercultural mediation capabilities in 14 learners of Japanese language before, during, and after a year of study in Japan. Through a variety of instruments, they are examining how students interpret, respond to, and negotiate identities, stereotypes, intercultural similarities and differences, the tensions arising from novel contact situations, the nature of the connections established, and how this is reflected in their language use. In short, they are investigating whether and how this long-term experience of "otherness" affects both performance and awareness.

Within the same network Angela Scarino, Anthony Liddicoat, and Michelle Kohler are developing specifications for the assessment of intercultural capabilities in languages learning in the K–12 setting in Australia. These will be used with teachers working in a range of languages to develop assessment procedures, implement them, and analyze samples of students' works for evidence of intercultural capabilities.

The new national curriculum for language learning in Australia has proposed an intercultural orientation to language teaching, learning, and assessment. Several studies related to the implementation of this curriculum, and related assessment practices, are currently being undertaken at the Research Centre for Languages and Cultures at the University of South Australia, in addition to experimenting with the design of elicitation processes.

The line of research by Cenoz and Gorter (2011) on trilingual students' participation in language practices that are shaped by the social and cultural context in the Basque Country and Friesland is continuing (see Gorter 2015) as is the work of Heugh et al. (2016).

## Problems and Difficulties

In expanding the construct of communicative competence toward symbolic, intercultural, and multilingual orientations (among the many new formulations that seek to represent this expansion), there is a need for explicit consideration of peoples' situatedness in the language/s and culture/s of their primary and ongoing socialization in the distinctive contexts of linguistic and cultural diversity. This attention is central to an understanding both of culture in language assessment and the role of culture in the assessment of students' learning outside the languages of their primary socialization, in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Difficulties remain at the level of conceptualization, elicitation, and judging.

## Conceptualizing Culture and Language Assessment

Further work is needed in conceptualizing the assessment of culture and the role of culture, particularly in multilingual and multicultural assessments. This may include, but is not limited to, the use of multiple languages in the assessment of content knowledge, the use of multiple languages and cultures in contemporary communication on the part of multilingual users, and a focus on interlinguistic and intercultural practices and capabilities in the assessment of additional languages. Both the conceptual work and its translation into assessment practice remain challenging because of the monolingual bias of both traditional SLA (May 2014; Leung and Scarino 2016) and traditional assessment (Shohamy 2011).

As part of this conceptual work, further consideration will need to be given to the context of culture and how it is perceived by participants in communication. Questions are being raised about the feasibility of assessing dimensions that go beyond the linguistic and the cultural, whether or not assessment philosophies and approaches can encompass the elicitation and judging of such complex practices and capabilities that go well beyond the linguistic and cultural per se, and the ethics of seeking to assess the realm of personal values, dispositions, effect, and critical awareness.

## Elicitation

The traditional product orientation of assessment does not capture the processual and reflective dimensions of assessing interlinguistic and intercultural and multilingual practices and capabilities. Finding productive ways of capturing cultural and intercultural interpretations will be difficult, and, in this regard, inquiry and hermeneutic approaches are likely to be of value (Moss 2008). These would permit the capturing for the purposes of assessment not only of experiences of interlinguistic and intercultural communication but also students' understandings of and reflections on the processes of meaning-making. The use of portfolios or journals, captured over time and including reflective commentaries, would seem fruitful. The complexity of

seeking to elicit the multiple facets of interlinguistic and intercultural communication (i.e., performance, analysis, and reflection) in an integrated and holistic way remains an area for experimentation. This is an important area for language educators who are concerned with developing as well as assessing such practices and capabilities. The elicitation process is necessarily framed by some understanding of the evidence that educators might expect to see in students' performances. As the kind of evidence of this kind of language-and-culture learning goes well beyond the accuracy, fluency, appropriateness, and complexity of language use, the very nature of this evidence will also require further consideration.

## Judging

As indicated earlier, there is a difficulty in judging, because of the uncertainty that arises for educators about judging student subjectivities and values. In the current state of play with assessment, what is absent is a larger frame of reference that educators need to bring to the processes of making judgments. Any instance of performance needs to be referenced against a map of other possible instances, but at this time, such a map is not available. As well, working with the notion of fixed rather than emerging criteria and scales adds complexity to the process. Educators desire certainty, when in fact there will necessarily be a great deal of uncertainty. This uncertainty relates to the absence of a shared frame of reference (such as one that they might have for a skill such as writing), but there are no firm guidelines as to what constitutes evidence. Furthermore, instances of communication of meaning across languages will be highly variable contextually, and yet it is precisely this linguistic and cultural variability and the linguistic and cultural situatedness of the participants that is being assessed in culture and language assessment.

In all three areas – conceptualizing, eliciting, and judging – the resilience of traditional practices is a major difficulty. In research, it is clear that both large-scale and smaller, grounded, ethnographic studies will be needed, focused on the assessment of interlinguistic and intercultural and multilingual practices and capabilities. It will be particularly fruitful for work in progress to be shared, compared, and theorized across research groups, given the immense diversity of local contexts of language-and-culture learning and its assessment.

Having highlighted the resilience of traditional assessment practices and their monolingual and monocultural bias, teacher education becomes a complex process of unlearning and learning. Teachers' assessment practices are heavily constrained by the requirements of the education systems in which they work. These requirements tend to be designed for accountability purposes more than for educational ones; therefore the environment is often not conducive to the kind of alternative practices that the assessment of these capabilities will require (see Scarino 2013 for a detailed discussion).

Finally, it must be recognized that this kind of work in assessment, both in terms of practices and research, will be resource-intensive and raise issues of practicability. However, what is at stake in considering culture and assessment is the very nature of

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language learning and its assessment and doing justice to capturing and giving value to the learning and achievements of students who are developing their multi-/interlinguistic and multi-/intercultural capabilities.

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## Future Directions

What is needed is a program of research, undertaken in diverse contexts, that considers the meaning-making processes of students in their multi-/interlinguistic work and multi-/intercultural work. These are likely to include processes such as decentering and translanguaging, mediating understanding across multiple languages, and paying greater attention to the positioning of students. Evidence might include analyses of moment-to-moment actions/interactions/reactions, conversations, or introspective processes that probe students' meanings; surveys, interviews, and self-reports; and reflective summaries and commentaries on actions, and reactions. Also needed is a focus on identifying and naming or describing the distinctive capabilities that can be characterized as multi-/interlinguistic and multi-/intercultural. These are the unique capabilities that bi-/multilingual students display as they move across diverse linguistic and cultural worlds. They are likely to include not only knowledge and skill but also embodied experience and their consideration of language/s and culture/s within that experience. Here it would become necessary to understand not only students' ideas but also their life worlds, their linguistic and cultural situatedness, and their histories and values; to understand the way these form the interpretive resources that they bring to the reciprocal interpretation and creation of meaning; and to understand both themselves (intraculturally) and themselves in relation to others (interculturally).

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## Cross-References

- ▶ [Assessing English as a Lingua Franca](#)
- ▶ [Assessing Second/Additional Language of Diverse Populations](#)
- ▶ [Using Portfolios for Assessment/Alternative Assessment](#)
- ▶ [The Common European Framework of Reference \(CEFR\)](#)

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## Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education

Anne-Brit Fenner: [Cultural Awareness in the Foreign Language Classroom](#). In Volume: Language Awareness and Multilingualism

Francesca Helm: [Critical Approaches to Online Intercultural Language Education](#). In Volume: Language, Education and Technology

Yiqi (April) Liu: [Popular Culture and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages \(TESOL\)](#). In Volume: Language, Education and Technology

Brenday O'Connor, Norma González: [Language Education and Culture](#).  
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