CHAPTER 4

From 'Intercultural Speaker' to 'Intercultural Reader': A Proposal to Reconceptualize Intercultural Communicative Competence Through a Focus on Literary Reading

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Introduction

In an essay about what education can learn from the arts, the US academic E. W. Eisner (2004) brings attention to how the conditions of our contemporary world necessitate a reconsideration of current educational methods and aims:

> our lives increasingly require the ability to deal with conflicting messages, to make judgments in the absence of rule, to cope with ambiguity, and to frame imaginative solutions to the problems we face. Our world is not one which submits single correct answers to questions or clear cut solutions to problems. (p. 9)

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The present chapter explores how intercultural competence (IC) may be reconceptualized as an educational goal to take into account such notions of conflict, ambiguity and imagination. The fragmentation and pluralism of postmodern societies as well as the development of global communicative technologies (see Chap. 5, this volume) have turned intercultural communication into a 'complex, changing and conflictual endeavor' that entails 'challenging established meanings and redefining the real' (Kramsch, 2011, p. 359). As a consequence, interculturality, to a larger extent than before, requires the ability to look beyond actions and words, to reflect upon the effects of subject positions and to analyse cultural assumptions from different vantage points in order to bring about new, imaginative understandings.

The present chapter addresses such concerns by adapting and reformulating a central term in foreign language (FL) didactic theory. Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC)[1] describes the ideal 'intercultural speaker's' engagement with both individuals and texts from foreign cultures, and accordingly processes of reading are included in the concept. The present chapter argues that the encounter with FL texts offers unique opportunities to investigate the complexities of intercultural communication, and proposes that the constitution of a profoundly engaged, analytical and creative 'intercultural reader' may add a new dimension to Byram's original concept. While other scholars have already highlighted the role of literary texts in promoting IC, the present chapter explores this issue from a different angle than previous efforts, focusing on what makes the reading of FL texts a form of intercultural communication in itself, and also on what distinguishes processes of text interpretation from real-time communication. In doing so, it examines aspects of the reader–text relationship on which Byram's model of ICC, as well as other theoretical perspectives on reading and IC, are unclear.

The research question has been formulated as follows: how does the competent 'intercultural reader' interact with FL literature in her quest to create meaning, and how may this interaction promote her awareness of the 'complex, changing and conflictual' (Kramsch, 2011, p. 359) nature of intercultural communication? In order to answer this question, the qualities of the competent 'intercultural reader' are defined, and a descriptive model of her engagement with FL texts is proposed. The chapter also provides a practical example of how the fostering of such 'intercultural readers' may take place in the FL classroom.

Background

The present chapter relies on a view of reading as a communicative experience. Gadamer's (1996) theory of hermeneutics describes the nature of interpretation, or the process of understanding a text, interhuman communication or the world at large, as a form of dialogue that transforms the interpreter as a moral subject. The need for interpretation arises when the subject is confronted with a 'horizon of understanding' different from her own, and, through dialogue, the two conflicting systems of convictions are integrated in a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1996, pp. 302–307). As the intercultural encounter represents such a meeting between different horizons of understanding due to divergent subjectivities, the reading of FL texts may function as a form of intercultural communication.

The dialogue between reader, text and their interaction, is the central principle of reader reception theory (Eco, 1990; Fish, 1980; Iser, 1978). According to this tradition of literary theory, the act of reading is a give-and-take process of meaning-making in which the reader and text interact in a dialectic relationship. Iser (1978) points out that the indeterminate quality of the literary text places it in an asymmetrical relationship with the reader, and balance can only be achieved if the 'gaps' of the text are filled by the reader's projections. Herein lies the major difference between reading and other forms of social interaction: the text cannot adapt itself to each reader with whom it comes in contact. The participants in other communicative situations can ask each other questions in order to clarify points of misunderstanding or disagreement, and they may adjust their responses and their own outlook accordingly. In contrast, the reader's interpretation of the text may, in Gadamarian terms, broaden the 'horizon' of the text and thus add to it a layer of meaning which did not previously exist, but because the text itself cannot change, 'a successful relationship between text and reader can only come about through changes in the reader's projections' (Iser, 1978, p. 167). This ability to decentre—to move away from one's own perspective in order to gain a fuller, more nuanced understanding—also lies at the core of the concept of IC (Bredella, 2003; Byram, 1997; Forsman, 2006).

Moreover, from a didactic perspective, it is worth noting how processes of text interpretation differ from real-time communication. While oral communication functions at a level of immediacy, for instance, the nature of the dialogue between reader and text is somewhat different, as the written word invites the reader into a more deliberative and reflective style of

communication than spoken interaction. The reader always has the option to stop to reflect on what she has read, to re-read certain passages, and to adjust her response to the text accordingly. The encounter with literature also gives the reader the unique opportunity to take on a number of different vantage positions in the communication process, since the possibility to revisit the text several times allows her to employ a range of analytical approaches in order to fill the 'gaps' of the text. In contrast, face-to-face encounters require a more immediate form of understanding, as they do not allow for the same amount of reflection and critical distance which may be involved in processes of text interpretation. From this viewpoint, the reading of a FL text provides opportunity for a multifaceted analysis of intercultural communication.

Previous Research on Reading and the Development of IC

In a context of language education, the reading of literature and other forms of fictional text[2] has traditionally been linked to *Bildung*, of which IC is an inseparable aspect (Bohlin, 2013; Byram, 2010; Fenner, 2012; Hoff, 2014). Indeed, the inherent qualities of FL literature have led scholars from diverse fields of research to highlight the role such texts may play in developing intercultural understanding (Bredella, 2006; Burwitz-Meltzer, 2001; Fenner, 2001, 2011; Greek, 2008; Hoff, 2013; Kramsch, 1993, 2011; MacDonald, Dasli, & Ibrahim, 2009). First of all, literature functions at both a cognitive and emotional level, much like IC itself (Narancic-Kovac & Kaltenbacher, 2006). Moreover, the reading of FL literary texts allows a 'symbolic dimension' (Kramsch, 2011) to be included in the concept of IC. Fenner (2001) argues that FL literature represents 'the personal voice of a culture' (p. 16), facilitating access to information rich in cultural details while at the same time allowing for personal contact with otherness. Furthermore, literary language is fraught with ambiguity and symbolism, and it consequently carries a multiplicity of possible meanings which must be negotiated by the reader (Fenner, 2001; Ibsen & Wiland, 2000; Kramsch, 1993). The reading of literary texts is thus a more subjective and emotional experience than the reading of factual texts. A literary narrative challenges the reader to place herself in somebody else's shoes (Bredella, 2006), and to enter into a negotiating dialogue with the values and worldviews inherent in the text. Because literature is 'neither oppositional to or representative of reality, [it] enables the (re)shaping of [the] reality of its reader' (MacDonald et al., 2009, p. 115).

At the same time, the 'multivocality' of the literary medium lends itself to a complex analysis of issues regarding culture, identity and difference (Greek, 2008).

A number of scholars within the field of FL didactics (e.g., Burwitz-Meltzer, 2001; Fenner, 2001; Gomez, 2012; Hoff, 2013; Kramsch, 2011; Narancic-Kovac & Kaltenbacher, 2006) have discussed reading practices and approaches to text that may be suited to bring about processes of intercultural learning in the FL classroom. Although much of this research emphasizes the importance of helping learners to establish a dialogical relationship with the text and offers didactic advice to practitioners in this respect, it does not explore the details of *how* the communication between reader and FL texts may take place. A recent study by Porto (2014) sheds some light on this matter, by 'extend[ing] the focus of research on intercultural communication to include the analysis of reading processes' (Porto, 2014, p. 518). Porto introduces a model that is partly based on Byram's model of ICC and may be used to identify the different ways in which FL learners understand the culture-specific dimensions of texts. Her study shows how the reading process involves moving back and forth between different levels of cultural understanding, and as such it is successful in capturing the fluid and procedural aspects of interculturality. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the understanding of cultural aspects of FL texts during reading is 'not a matter of idea units present or absent in a recall, but a question of increasing levels of complexity and detail' (Porto, 2013, p. 285).

What Porto's study does not reveal, however, is how readers go about accessing these different levels of complexity. In an educational context, it is important to bear in mind that learners' competences as 'intercultural readers' will not be developed automatically as a result of their exposure to a FL text. In fact, such exposure may, for instance, serve to uphold cultural stereotypes rather than countering them, unless prejudiced attitudes are explicitly brought out in the open and challenged in the classroom (Hoff, 2013). Moreover, research indicates that it is a particular challenge for young readers to use and understand other contexts than their own 'here and now' perspectives as they interpret literary texts (Skarstein, 2013). Adolescent readers are inclined to be either completely immersed in the experience (Appleyard, 1991) or they may exhibit a resistant attitude to the text due to the estrangement effect of reading in a foreign language (Hoff, 2013; Thyberg, 2012). This means that young readers of FL literature may fill the 'gaps' of the text solely with their own projections or

they may overlook aspects of potential conflict and ambivalence; in short, they may not be as inclined to scrutinize the text from a critical distance as more mature readers.

Accordingly, it is not possible to separate cultural competence from literary competence when it comes to the reading of FL texts. In order to integrate language, literature and culture in FL education it is not sufficient for teachers to be able to identify different levels of complexity and detail in learners' ability to access and understand the cultural dimensions of FL texts; they must also have insight into *how* the communicative process between a competent 'intercultural reader' and FL text takes place so that they can *assist* the learners into accessing and dealing with such complexity. In other words, there is a need for research that examines the reader–FL text relationship closely. In order to provide a context for such an investigation, a discussion of intercultural communication in general and the qualities of Byram's 'intercultural speaker' in particular, is first provided.

The Complexities of Intercultural Communication

IC entails the ability to successfully communicate across cultures. This is especially prominent in Byram's influential model of ICC, which is an extension of the concept of communicative competence, a central concern in FL education since the 1980s. First published in *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence* in 1997, Byram's model defines the qualities of a quintessential 'intercultural speaker' who is genuinely concerned with 'establishing and maintaining relationships' across cultural boundaries (Byram, 1997, p. 3). The model identifies five aspects of learning that should be cultivated in order to foster such competence:

> *Savoir*: knowledge of self and other; of interaction; individual and societal.
> *Savoir être*: attitudes; relativizing self, valuing other.
> *Savoir comprendre*: skills of interpreting and relating.
> *Savoir apprendre/faire*: skills of discovering and/or interacting.
> *Savoir s'engager*: political education, critical cultural awareness. (adapted from Byram, 1997, p. 34)

According to Byram (2000), the intercultural speaker is able 'to see relationships between different cultures—both internal and external to a society—and to mediate, that is interpret each in terms of the other, either

for [himself] or for other people'. He also knows how to 'critically or analytically understand that one's own and other cultures' perspective is culturally determined rather than natural' (Byram, 2000, p. 10).

However, successful communication cannot be achieved merely through an understanding of how different cultural contexts affect the interpretation of what one says or writes, and a reason for this is that processes of globalization and migration have made it increasingly difficult to attach meaning to such concepts as 'culture' and 'identity' (see Chap. 8 and 9, this volume). Indeed, the impact of transnational and multilingual cultures has been the focus of a significant amount of research within the fields of sociolinguistics (Bloomaert, 2010; Zarate, Lévy, & Kramsch, 2008) and FL didactics (Byram, 2008; Fenoulhet & Ros i Solé, 2011; Kramsch, 2009; Risager, 2007). Ros i Solé (2013) notes that Byram's model is 'rooted in a single mother tongue and nation and its accompanying social spheres and spaces', and argues that this 'limit[s] the ways in which multilingual subjects are able to position themselves in the language learning experience and the roles they are allowed to adopt' (Ros i Solé, 2013, p. 335). She therefore proposes to expand the concept of the 'intercultural speaker' to a 'cosmopolitan speaker' in order to take into account multiple and complex identities more effectively. A consequence of such complexity is that IC is

> not only a question of tolerance towards or empathy with others, of understanding them in their cultural context, or of understanding oneself and the other in terms of one another. It is also a matter of looking beyond words and actions and embracing multiple, changing and conflicting discourse worlds. (Kramsch, 2011, p. 356)

This means that intercultural communication may be a challenging, even uncomfortable and confusing, undertaking. It is thus essential that intercultural education plays a role in promoting learners' ability to handle conflict and ambiguity in a constructive and creative manner.

To what extent, then, are ambivalence and uncertainty recognized as a part of 'the intercultural speaker's' experience as he engages with otherness? Byram's model acknowledges that the 'intercultural speaker' may go through 'different stages of adaptation to and interaction with' otherness, and that these stages may include 'phases of acceptance and rejection' (*savoir être*) (Byram, 1997, p. 58). This means that the model to some extent incorporates elements of conflict and ambivalence, but the central

aim for the 'intercultural speaker' is to overcome such temporary drawbacks in order to establish a harmonious relationship with an interlocutor, or to help along such relationships between other individuals. For instance, the 'intercultural speaker' helps 'interlocutors overcome conflicting perspectives' (*savoir comprendre*) and to 'negotiate agreement on places of conflict and acceptance of difference' (*savoir s'engager*) (Byram, 1997, pp. 61, 64). It should be noted that 'the intercultural speaker' acknowledges the fact that opposing views may not always be possible to reconcile. However, this appears to be a solution for which he 'may settle when all attempts of a harmonious fusion of horizons have failed, rather than as positive conditions for the communication process' (Hoff, 2014, p. 514). In terms of its potential to enhance 'the intercultural speaker's' awareness of the complex and frequently conflictual nature of intercultural communication, then, what may not be adequately expressed in Byram's model is an acknowledgement of how conflict, misunderstanding and disagreement may lead to 'meaningful communicative situations in which the participants are deeply engaged, thus contributing to a higher level of honesty and involvement' (Hoff, 2014, p. 514).

The FL learner's encounter with literature can play an important role in this respect. Iser (1978) notes that it is the very 'lack of ascertainability' in the reading process, caused by the indeterminacy of the literary text, that 'gives rise to communication' (pp. 166, 167). Accordingly, phases of conflict, misunderstanding and ambiguity are a natural part of any encounter with literature, and should not be regarded as barriers hindering successful communication, but as *catalysts* for communication itself. Indeed, the tolerance and even the aesthetic enjoyment of ambiguity is 'a key "competence" for an appreciation of literature and the development of literary literacy in a broader sense' (Lütge, 2012, p. 193). Since text interpretation always involves 'a logic of uncertainty and qualitative probability' (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 159), learners' engagement with FL literature may be essential in promoting their disposition to see the world not in black or white but in multiple, subtle nuances.

Moreover, because discourse both reveals and conceals something about the nature of being, seemingly effective communication may be no more than a common illusion, behind which 'the circulation of values and identities across cultures, the inversions, even inventions of meaning' (Kramsch, Lévy, & Zarate, 2008, p. 15)[3] may be hidden. What the 'intercultural speaker' perceives as harmony and mutual understanding, then, may in fact be a deception. Indeed, he cannot always take what the interlocutor

says at face value. This is not necessarily a matter of recognizing whether the other's utterances are to be trusted, but of exploring the subconscious dimensions of the dialogue. The theoretical perspective of the Russian philosopher, literary critic and semiotician Bakhtin (2006) may be used to illustrate the complex nature of interhuman communication in general, and the act of text interpretation in particular. Bakthin employs the terms 'heteroglossia' and 'polyphony' to describe how any utterance bears traces of other voices and discourses: 'Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions' (Bakhtin, 2006, p. 293). This means that there is always a multiplicity of possible, even conflicting, interpretations that must be considered and negotiated in order to make sense of human discourse or a text, and the implicit ideologies involved must be identified and challenged.

Byram's model of ICC answers this need to take into account and scrutinize multiple perspectives by emphasizing the 'intercultural speaker's' recognition of how different cultural points of view may lead to diverse experiences of texts or events. The 'intercultural speaker' is able to use the encounter with an interlocutor from a foreign culture to 'discover other perspectives on interpretation' (*savoir être*), to 'establish relationships of similarity and difference between them' (*savoir apprendre/faire*) and to 'mediate' between them (*savoir comprendre*) (Byram, 1997, pp. 58, 62, 61). Furthermore, he knows how to 'identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents' and is able to 'place a document […] in contexts (of origins/sources, time, place, other documents or events)' (*savoir s'engager*) (Byram, 1997, p. 63). In other words, he is able to disclose ideological dimensions in the text and to identify aspects of intertextuality in order to explore how the text draws on prior discourses.

It follows from this that the 'intercultural speaker' acknowledges that processes of reading entail examining the FL text from a number of different vantage points, and he may thus be in possession of some important tools that might help him in his quest to look beyond actions and words in the intercultural encounter. However, what is lacking in Byram's model is the 'intercultural speaker's' recognition of what distinguishes processes of text interpretation, and particularly the reading of literary texts, from other forms of intercultural communication. In the following, the complex processes of communication that may potentially take place during the reading of FL texts, are explored in order to define the qualities of an ideal 'intercultural reader'.

Defining the 'Intercultural Reader'

A unique characteristic of the literary medium is that it is not governed by time and space constraints as it speaks to its readers. From this viewpoint, FL literature gives readers the opportunity to communicate with literary voices from other cultural, social and historical contexts. The multivocality of literary texts adds to the complexity of this interpretative process. A piece of FL literature does not represent 'the personal voice of a culture' (Fenner, 2001, p. 16) as much as it can be said to be an amalgam of multiple, diverse and even conflicting voices along a spectrum of accessibility: those of the narrator, the protagonist, the antagonist, other characters, the author, the implied author, the implied reader,[4] etc. In other words, the text encompasses multiple, complex identities that must be discerned by the reader.

Furthermore, the reader's communication with these diverse voices may be enhanced or obscured by the narrative style and structure of the text. The point of view, tone, range of vocabulary, use of symbols as well as adherence to or breach with familiar genre conventions, for instance, have an impact on how the text speaks to the reader, and on how the reader responds. Such processes are further influenced by the plot, setting and theme of the text, that is, the structural framework underlying the order and manner in which the story is told. The way in which one expresses oneself, either as a result of deliberate or subconscious choices, is of course a central element in any intercultural encounter, but processes of text interpretation offer the reader the opportunity to analyse the *effects* of such choices and to pay as much attention to what is not said as to what is said (Kramsch, 2011).

Moreover, the lack of time and space constraints allows readers to take into account how a wide range of other prior and contemporary readers experience the text. It is thus not sufficient for a reader of a FL text to gain insight into how a particular interlocutor from a foreign culture may understand the text differently from her; she is interested in exploring how and why the cultural, social and historical subject positions of a wide range of readers may lead to different interpretations. The subjective nature of literary reading lends itself to an examination of how diverse, even opposing, perspectives can be found among readers *within* a given culture, not only across cultural boundaries. Such an emphasis on the individual rather than the collective aspect of intercultural communication may lead to an understanding of cultural identity as a dynamic and multidimensional concept (see Chaps. 8 and 9, this volume).

Another point for consideration is that different pieces of literature may address the same basic themes or events. They may be set apart by the particular language that they use or by the way the events are framed and narrated. In order to gain an understanding of how the FL text both draws upon and challenges prior discourses (*savoir s'engager*), the reader must examine the manner in which it communicates with other texts, both contemporary and from other historical periods. She must also consider the extent to which she and other readers respond differently to these other texts, and reflect on *why* such responses may be similar or disparate.

It follows from this that the encounter with FL literature has the potential to be a multifaceted endeavour, which may enhance the reader's understanding of the 'complex, changing and conflictual' (Kramsch, 2011, p. 359) nature of intercultural communication. The reader's consideration of how the text communicates with a wide range of other readers and texts enables her to challenge her own prior understandings as well as those of others in order to construct new interpretations. The qualities of a competent, creative and flexible 'intercultural reader' may thus be summed up as follows:

1. The 'intercultural reader' regards the reading of FL texts as a form of intercultural communication, and understands how the nature of text interpretation allows her to explore the complexity of this type of communication from a number of different vantage points.
2. The 'intercultural reader' regards conflict and ambiguity as catalysts for communication rather than as communicative difficulties to be overcome, and consequently seeks out and explores such conditions both in terms of her own emotional response to the FL text and as inherent aspects of the text itself.
3. The 'intercultural reader' takes into account how the FL text may communicate with other contemporary and prior texts and readers as she attempts to fill the 'gaps' in the reading process. This venture involves exploring the effects of her own cultural, social and historical subject positions as well as those of the FL text itself, other texts, and other readers.
4. The 'intercultural reader' takes into account how discourse both reveals and conceals something about the nature of being, and is consequently concerned with the effects of different narrative styles and structures. This entails looking beyond the surface of the FL text as well as developing a critical awareness of how she and others communicate.

5. The 'intercultural reader' regards her encounter with FL literature as a creative undertaking that entails challenging prior understandings and constructing new, creative interpretations.

Three Levels of Communication

The following is an attempt to describe the processes of communication in which the competent 'intercultural reader' takes part as she interprets a piece of FL literature. Her engagement with the text can be said to operate at three, interlinked levels of communication, each of which involves her emotions as well as her cognition. At all three levels, the effects of narrative choices as well as the various cultural, social and historical subject positions of text(s) and reader(s) are considered by the 'intercultural reader'.

Level 1 involves the 'intercultural reader's' engagement with multiple voices inherent in the FL text. The protagonist and other characters often represent the most easily accessible voices of the text, and are consequently also the ones to trigger her immediate emotional response. At the other end of the spectrum, the 'intercultural reader's' communication with the implied author/reader relies not only on a high degree of abstract thinking and critical investigation of the narrative; it may also require research of external sources.

At Level 2, the 'intercultural reader' takes into account how other readers may communicate with the FL text, and she reflects on how different subject positions make some interpretations possible/likely and others impossible/unlikely. Her investigation may include contemporary and prior readers who share the 'intercultural reader's' own cultural background, readers from the author's/narrator's/literary characters'/implied author's/implied reader's cultures, as well as readers from cultures with no apparent connection to the text or the 'intercultural reader' herself. A variety of diverse interpretations among readers within a given culture are considered.

Furthermore, this deliberation of other interpretations may take place on a concrete or an abstract level, depending on whether the perspectives of the other can be explicitly accessed. In a classroom context, for instance, the text-interpretation process has the potential to become a collaborative effort (Aase, 2005; Ibsen & Wiland, 2000). Such democratic and sociocultural processes of text interpretation may allow the different subjectivities of the classroom to be recruited rather than ignored (Tornberg, 2004), and may thus contribute to an understanding of cultural identity as a complex phenomenon. Other, concrete sources that might be taken into

consideration at this level of the 'intercultural reader's' communication with the text, are book reviews or alternate versions of the text.[5] Where such concrete sources are not possible to access, the 'intercultural reader' must draw upon her existing knowledge of foreign cultures (*savoir*) and project herself into the position of Another (*savoir être*) in order to imagine how the text may be understood from other points of view. In doing so, she must also reflect upon how the subjective nature of literary reading as well as the multiple, complex identities of individuals make it difficult to foresee how others may respond to a given text.

Level 3 takes into account how the FL text may communicate with other texts. This means that texts from different cultures, time periods and genres are compared and contrasted. The aim of the 'intercultural reader' is not only to identify aspects of intertextuality, but to juxtapose the FL text with other texts in order to explore the extent to which alternate narrative choices and subject positions affect her understanding.

Based on the above discussion, I propose a schema of the communicative processes involved and the relationships between them, in Fig. 4.1.

The 'intercultural reader's' quest to fill the 'gaps' of the FL text involves a continuous expansion of her projections upon the text, and the act of reading should, therefore, be regarded as a dynamic process of moving back and forth between the different levels, leading to a gradually increasing awareness of the inherent complexities of the text as well as the

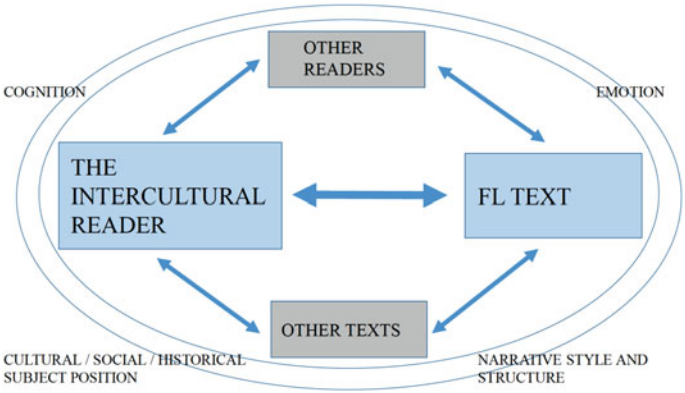

Fig. 4.1 Model of the intercultural reader's engagement with FL literary texts

interpretation process. Because both the narrative style and structure of the text and the cultural, social and historical subject positions of the readers as well as those of the literary voices have an impact on the communication process, the model illustrates the fact that linguistic, cultural and literary competence cannot be separated when it comes to the reading of FL texts. The teacher's role in this process is discussed in the following section.

Fostering the 'Intercultural Reader': Some Suggestions for the FL Classroom

The three-level model proposed here describes the ideal 'intercultural reader's' interaction with FL texts. However, the model may also be used to inform teaching procedures and reading practices in the FL classroom. In this respect, the central task for the FL teacher is to draw the learners' attention to potential 'gaps' in the text, and then to encourage them to explore such ambiguities from a variety of different vantage positions involving all of the three levels of communication described in the model.

Because the subject's emotional and personal involvement is essential to the development of IC (Byram, 1997, 2010; Fenner, 2001, 2012; Kramsch, 2009; Narancic-Kovac & Kaltenbacher, 2006), the effect of negotiating meaning from the 'gaps' of the literary text may be enhanced if the learners are explicitly encouraged to explore feelings of confusion, discomfort and tension during reading. One way to bring about such processes in the FL classroom is by including texts that *challenge* the learners on a number of levels, for instance in the form of provocative subject matters, the inclusion of unsympathetic literary characters who may be difficult to relate to or narrators whose trustworthiness is disputable. The degree of complexity in this process must be adjusted to the learners' prior experience with texts, but it must also challenge their creativity and capacity for critical and abstract thinking. It is important to note, however, that any resistance and discomfort exhibited by learners upon their initial contact with the text do not mean that a sense of openness cannot be maintained at the same time. In the words of Ricoeur (1970), hermeneutics, or the process of interpreting, is 'animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigor, vow of obedience' (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 27). This means that elements of contention and disagreement do not rule out the possibility of establishing a meaningful relationship with the FL text; in fact, such conditions may stimulate a more profound dialogue.

Let us look at an example of how such a multifaceted interaction with literary texts may be promoted in the FL classroom. The following is not intended to be a normative or exhaustive representation of how reading should take place as a form of intercultural communication, but the example to be discussed here shows how learners may be encouraged into and guided through processes of text interpretation which involve all three levels of communication. Moreover, it indicates how such communication may take place across notions of time and place, involving varying degrees of critical and abstract thinking.

The word 'nigger' (often referred to as the 'N-word' to avoid controversy) is a highly sensitive term that carries connotations of racism, oppression and dark chapters in African American history. Mark Twain's classic novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* may be juxtaposed with an episode of the contemporary TV series *The Wire*, and learners of English as a foreign language[6] may be invited to compare and contrast the use of the word in the two texts. The classroom discussion may revolve around such questions as:

- How did the use of the N-word in these texts make you feel? Why did it invoke such a reaction? Discuss your responses in groups. To what extent are your reactions similar or different? What may be the reasons that you respond similarly/differently? (Levels 1, 2)
- How might your response(s) differ from an American reader in general, and an African American reader in particular? Is it even possible for you to make assumptions about this? Why/why not? (Level 2)
- Does the word mean the same thing in the two texts? (Levels 1, 3)
- Read some of the reviews written at the time *Huckleberry Finn* was first published.[7] What can these reviews tell you about the critics' attitudes to the use of the word in the book? Would the use of the word be a point of discussion in your own review of the book? Why/why not? (Levels 1, 2)
- In recent years, some publishers have removed the N-word and replaced it with 'slave'. Which effect does this have, do you think? Can you think of other texts (written in a foreign language or your own mother tongue) that have been treated in a similar way? Do you agree or disagree with such a decision? Why? (Levels 2, 3)
- What do you think are Mark Twain's and the creator of *The Wire*'s attitudes to the use of the word? What kinds of evidence in the texts do you base your assumption on? (Levels 1, 3)

- The narrator of *Huckleberry Finn* uses the word when talking to and about Jim, a runaway slave who becomes his friend. In *The Wire*, the word is used by members of the police force to insult the African American teenagers, but it is also used humorously and affectionately among the teenagers themselves. What makes it possible for these various characters to use the word in such different ways, do you think? (Levels 1, 3)
- Do you think that the word would have been used in the same way if Jim had been the narrator of *HF* rather than Huck? Why/why not? (Levels 1, 3)
- *Huckleberry Finn* is considered to be one of the greatest works of American literature, while *The Wire* is a contemporary product of pop culture which reaches a wide, international audience. Do the different statuses of these texts legitimize your own use of the word in any way? If so, which one, and why? (Levels 1, 3)

When discussing these questions, the learners may gain profound insight into the various cultural, social and historical implications of an utterance. Their emotions are explicitly included as they are asked to examine aspects of ambiguity, contradictions and intertextuality, in addition to considering different interpretations, and even alternate versions, of the texts. Both concrete examples, in the form of fellow classmates' readings and book reviews from a different time in history, as well as abstract examples in the form of the learners' perceptions about other people's perspectives, are included. Throughout this set of questions, there is a focus on the effects of narrative choices and subject positions. Finally, the juxtaposition of a piece of nineteenth-century 'classical' literature with a contemporary pop-culture text allows learners to ponder how we draw on prior discourses to express ourselves, and to reflect on how notions of language, culture and identity may be manipulated in order to challenge established meanings and redefine our reality.

Conclusion

As expressed by the editors in Chap. 1, the aim of this volume is to offer innovative and critical perspectives on IC as an educational aim. In such respect, the present chapter adds a new dimension to the academic discourse on IC and reading through a close examination of the relationship

between reader and FL text. The chapter has explored why and how the process of interpreting a FL text may be regarded as a multifaceted form of intercultural communication. Adapting and reformulating a central concept in FL didactic theory, it has addressed the need to define the qualities of a profoundly engaged, analytical and creative 'intercultural reader' in order to supplement Byram's original description of the 'intercultural speaker'. Answering to recent developments in culture, sociolinguistics and FL didactic theory, the chapter has argued that the subjective and indeterminate nature of literary reading makes FL literature a particularly suited medium through which to foster individuals who are capable of handling the complexities of our contemporary world in a constructive, creative manner.

A descriptive model of 'the intercultural reader's' engagement with FL literature has been proposed and discussed. This model shows how the text interpretation process may operate at three, interlinked levels of communication, each of which involves the 'intercultural reader's' emotions as well as her cognition. At all three levels, she considers the effects of the narrative style and structure of the text as well as the various cultural, social and historical subject positions of text(s) and reader(s). Furthermore, the model takes into account how the text-interpretation process may take place across notions of time and place, involving varying degrees of critical and abstract thinking. In order to demonstrate the relevance of the model for educational practice, the chapter has provided a practical example of how the fostering of 'intercultural readers' may take place in the FL classroom.

By defining and discussing the qualities of the 'intercultural reader' as well as the communicative processes involved in her reading of FL literature, the chapter has illuminated aspects of the reader-FL text relationship on which previous theoretical perspectives on reading and IC, are unclear. In doing so, it has shown how it is not possible to separate IC from literary competence when it comes to the reading of FL texts, and the model may thus hopefully contribute to the integration of language, culture and literature in FL education. Further, empirical research is needed regarding the use of the model as a tool for analysing readers' engagement with FL texts.

Notes

1. Byram (1997) uses the label 'intercultural communicative competence' to indicate that his model expands the concept of communicative competence, in addition to making explicit that it is first and foremost relevant in a context of FL teaching and assessment (Byram, 1997, p. 3). In the following, the term ICC will be used when referring specifically to Byram's model, whereas the term intercultural competence (IC) will be used more broadly.
2. This includes films and other forms of multimodal texts. For the sake of brevity, the term 'literature' is in the following used as a common denominator for such fictional texts.
3. This is originally a quote in French. One of the co-authors provides the English translation in Kramsch (2011).
4. The *implied author* is a term which refers to the character a reader may attribute to the author based on the way the text is written, and accordingly it may not correspond with the author's true personality. The *implied reader* exists merely in the imagination of the author, and may be reconstructed only through the latter's statements or extra-textual information (Abrams, 1999, pp. 219, 257).
5. For instance, Baz Luhrman's film *Romeo + Juliet* may be approached as an interpretation of Shakespeare's original play.
6. Due to the explicit language of the dialogue in *The Wire*, this particular lesson plan is suitable for upper-secondary-level learners above 16 years of age. An example of a classroom discussion of *The Wire* can be found in (Hoff, 2013).
7. http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/huckfinn/hucrevhp.html

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