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Intercultural Learning

ADELHEID HU

Intercultural Learning and Intercultural Competence

Along with the important objective of communicative competence in foreign-language learning, intercultural learning has been emphasized, especially since the 1980s, as a main objective of foreign and second language pedagogy (Bredella & Christ, 1995; Hu & Byram, 2009a). Some approaches consider the two as complementary—Byram (1997) refers to "intercultural communicative competence" when he stresses the meaning of complementary, and refers to Hymes's early ways of describing the notion of communicative competence. The strong link between language and culture has often been stressed (e.g., Kramsch, 1998). Affective aspects like prejudices, the importance of willingness to engage with others (Byram, 1997), and the role of preexisting linguistic and cultural knowledge, on the basis of which learners acquire new knowledge—often conceptualized in terms of schema and script theories (Schank & Abelson, 1977)—have become increasingly important for research on language and cultural learning. Relativization and decentring from an often unconscious cultural imprint and understanding cultural otherness have been conceptualized as learning goals and objectives (Zarate, 2003) or "to see ourselves as others see us" also helped to implement the concept of decentration. Intercultural understanding and empathy in particular have been thoroughly discussed in the context of foreign-language learning (Bredella, 1992; Hu, 1998; Harden & Witte, 2000).

Concurrently, competence orientation in education systems in general and language teaching and learning in particular became one of the most important developments in Europe. In this respect, the Common European Framework of Reference is a milestone for the development of foreign-language teaching (Council of Europe, 2001). The impact of this document throughout Europe was attested by survey and it has been widely translated both in Europe and beyond. A particularly relevant point was the formulation of levels of partial competences and the general orientation of foreign-language teaching toward output and outcomes instead of, as in the past, toward input and content. In this new context, the earlier theoretical work on intercultural learning and understanding shifted more to the question of intercultural *competence*—a term that in the Anglophone context as well as in the field of business communication had already been widely used for a while (Byram, 1997; Glaser, Guilherme, Mendez Garcia, & Mughan, 2007). In this development, the concept of intercultural competence becomes—on the curricular and normative level—an important goal. Nonetheless the concept remains as fuzzy as ever and is at risk of not being realized in concrete ways in curricula or having a substantial role in language teaching because of the simultaneously developing pressure for visible and measurable realizations of competences. Zydatiss describes the dilemma as follows:

> The question is, whether language teaching as a whole should fundamentally reject this outcomes-orientated thinking, at least in certain parts—for example in the teaching of literature or in the content dimension of intercultural learning—or whether, in its own interest, it would better be actively involved in this process (for example in order not to be completely ejected from the curriculum). . . . If literature teaching and the teaching of intercultural learning want to link their aims to foreign language teaching, they must engage actively with the conceptualization and validation of test tasks or at least make their demands clear vis-à-vis the education policy in this respect. (2006, pp. 258–9, my translation)

The pressure is tremendous, and schools, teachers, and theorists are well advised to find practical operationalizations for teaching and learning as quickly as possible and to present applicable models—especially for the assessment of intercultural competence. In fact, this has already led to significant attempts to develop exercises in intercultural competence (see for example Huber-Kriegler, Lázár, & Strange, 2003) and to propose levels of intercultural competence (Béacco, 2004; see INCA Project at www.incaproject.org). Nonetheless, the problem remains that the assumed developmental stages of intercultural competence are not empirically founded and that they are presented in universalist terms, in other words independently of context and age of learners. Furthermore, these approaches use existing concepts of "culture," "difference," "identity," and "interculturality," which from a cultural studies perspective are questionable. What is presented under the key word "intercultural competence"—not least in education policy position papers—is often an agglomeration of everyday concepts and attitudes which are put aside in scientific research on these issues. There is a mismatch and, in part, a contradiction between theory building in cultural studies on the one hand and intercultural positions focused on practical applications on the other. At the same time it is evident that cultural theory seldom provides concrete starting points for empirical research design or the development of teaching in practice. The challenge in the development of empirical research designs and exercises for teaching and learning is therefore not to fall short of the established theoretical and empirical knowledge base.

Despite these current tendencies (for a thorough discussion of the assessment of intercultural competence, see Hu & Byram, 2009b), this entry will focus on some hermeneutical aspects of intercultural learning, namely the problem of understanding cultural otherness ("Fremdverstehen"; "savoir comprendre") and the concept of culture itself with its

epistemological consequences for intercultural learning. The entry will conclude with some remarks about the current challenges for research, in the field of both intercultural learning and intercultural competence.

Understanding Cultural Otherness: An Essential Part of Intercultural Learning

In the context of intercultural learning, understanding plays an important role. The circle of researchers around Herbert Christ and Lothar Bredella in particular has reflected on intercultural understanding in the context of foreign-language learning, namely the problem of the oversimplification of foreign-language learning in the course of the communicative turn in foreign-language teaching:

> Lately, communicative teaching has repeatedly been accused of oversimplifying the meaning of communication. The accusation is justified in view of the fact that the communication targeted in foreign language teaching barely encouraged the learner to query what the other intended and meant by his utterance. Thus, it did not trigger any interpretation process through which the learner could activate and jeopardize his world knowledge and his moral concept. It is only when the act of interpretation is centered that it becomes evident that understanding is a dynamic and risky educational process that has repercussions on self-understanding and one's own world-view. (Bredella & Christ, 1995, p. 10, my translation)

Thus, understanding is not perceived as mere "rule-governed decoding" (p. 10), but rather as a creative act which can lead to identity changes.

However, the core problem of intercultural understanding remains the following: How can one understand otherness without reducing it to one's own understanding? To what extent is understanding linked to the preconception of the understanding person and, in that sense, not capable of allowing unconditional understanding of the other? To what extent is understanding even a mere act of projection that amplifies ethnocentric views instead of overcoming them? (See Bredella, 1994, pp. 21–3; for a very fundamental debate on this issue from a hermeneutical–philosophical perspective, see Kögler, 1992). While Bredella in particular advocated until recently (see, e.g., Hunfeld, 1993), others, some questioned understanding as a didactical concept (see Bredella, 2007) a concept of understanding that goes beyond such an appropriation. From their point of view, understanding otherness is an interplay between an inside and an outside perspective as a "dynamic and infinite educational process that has repercussions on self-understanding and one's own worldview" ("dynamischen unabschließbaren Bildungsprozess mit Rückwirkung auf das eigene Selbst- und Weltverständnis"; Bredella, 2007, p. 11).

Intercultural Learning as a Change of Perspectives

One basic assumption is that the understanding process oscillates between two perspectives: an embraced "emic (inner) perspective" and an "etic (outside) perspective." Emic perspective means that the other's culture should be understood from the inside. In other words, it is an attempt to see the other's culture through the eyes of the members of that same culture. This involves temporarily suspending one's own values, norms, and behavior patterns and practically "immersing" oneself in the other culture. By contrast, adopting an outside perspective means that the other's culture is always seen through one's own eyes and understood based on one's unavoidable preconceptions. This implies that

one does not absolutely assimilate the other culture but learns to interpret the phenomena from a critical and distant attitude. According to Bredella and Christ, the interplay and the interlocking of those perspectives generate a productive understanding of otherness that is characterized by empathy as well as by critical reflection.

In his 2007 article, Bredella differentiates the idea of outside perspective even more by distinguishing between outside perspective I and II. Outside perspective I refers to the understanding of phenomena pertaining to a foreign culture on the basis of one's own preconception. Outside perspective II occurs when outside perspective I is modified by the attempt to adopt the inside perspective:

> Then [by adopting the outside perspective I], we however find out that we have to learn to suspend our perceptions and opinions and develop an inside perspective that will allow us to see the otherness as being different from oneself. That way we learn that the foreign language and the foreign culture not only constitute a distorted form of our own language and culture but that they also follow their own laws of logic. That does not mean that our perceptions and opinions have disappeared, they come back into play on a reflected level that hence comprehends also the other's opinions and views, I shall call it the outside perspective II. (Bredella, 2007, p. 24, my translation)

When one adopts the outside perspective II, this means not only that an alignment with one's own preconception has occurred but, even more, that a third space can develop that transcends otherness and oneself. The outside perspective II expresses the idea that the understanding process always starts from one's own reference point—even when adopting the inside perspective—but that one's horizon can be expanded and a third space can even emerge.

Intercultural Learning and the Concept of Culture

Since the 1990s, a deconstruction of essentialist concepts of culture has been observed in culture studies and cognate disciplines. There is a broad consensus that cultures are never independent of the observer's perspective. Even though it still prevails in regular theories today, the longtime prevalent concept of cultures as being coherent and delimitable entities is considered obsolete. Instead, a discursive reflexive concept of culture that has the property of creating meaning is now being embraced: "Culture seems to be a process of progressive reflexive semantization through which resources for meaning are constantly being created and distributed but at the same time can be subverted and destroyed" (Böhme, 2000, p. 356, my translation). Thus, culture and language are indivisible. Göller relates this explicitly to the phenomenon of intercultural communication:

> Human creation of meaning, intracultural and intercultural communication and interaction as well as reference to self, to the other and to the world—in other words, the human cultural assignment of meaning per se—is primarily bound to language, it is conveyed through language. This is valid for all forms of intracultural and intercultural exchange. . . . Language and culture are very closely entwined. (Göller, 2000, pp. 330–3, my translation)

Simultaneously, beside this epistemological change of perspective, the accent is not laid on the collective consensus anymore; instead, disparities, antagonism, syncretism, hybridity, idiosyncratic patterns of meaning and processing take center stage. Culture is not considered anymore as the "integrative adhesive" ("integrativer Kitt") of society (Hörning & Winter, 1999, p. 8). On the contrary, the objective of reflexive critical work is now to

debunk cultural homogeneity as an orchestration (for more on new metaphors in the description of cultural phenomena, see Hu, 2005). Eventually, the "category of power" has also gained in importance for cultural issues. Wägenbaur for example refers to objectifying and essentializing culture concepts in particular as "metaphorical-metonymical means of enforcing power interests"(Wägenbaur, 1995, p. 23).

This new view of culture also has an impact on intercultural learning and intercultural communication: it is a challenge for traditional positions, which seem to prevail unquestioned especially in foreign-language didactics (see Risager, 1998). The discourse taking place in the interaction becomes more important than the "category of origin": intercultural communication and intercultural learning occur when interlocutors have exchanges about cultural plans, demarcations, values, or norms, when they argue, or when they position themselves within one of those norms. Hence, in that sense, intercultural communication can definitely also occur between speakers of the same language or the same country. It is understandable—but not self-evident—that interlocutors who hail from different and distant world regions and who speak different native languages would rather come to speak about cultural themes as mentioned above (see Hu, 1999, pp. 297–8).

For intercultural learning, these developments in culture theory definitely represent a challenge. The issue of interculturality and the concept of foreign culture have been deprived of their matter-of-factness and, in the course of time, examined more closely (see for example, the recent discussion on "transcultural learning" and "intercultural learning" in Bredella, 2010, pp. 126–45).

Current Challenges for Research on Intercultural Learning and Intercultural Competence in Language Pedagogy

Current research focuses particularly on the following matters: how to empirically reconstruct intercultural learning processes in the context of foreign-language teaching, how developments in this context can be represented, and which tools allow the measurement of intercultural competences. Currently, there are different approaches: While researchers of the DESI study group have actually tried to evaluate intercultural competences by means of pedagogical psychology (see Hesse, Göbel, & Jude, 2008), others have been opposing that procedure and advocate "softer" evaluation forms such as self-reflexion (see Byram, 2009, and the "Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters" presented there). The current state of research is marked by a trend toward interdisciplinarity and an internationalization of the matter. By way of example, Hu and Byram (2009a) have reflected on the different approaches of cultural studies, pedagogical psychology, and developmental psychology. Unresolved questions are, for instance:

- How does subjective knowledge about the cultural basis of traditions, norms, and modes of behavior develop?
- When and how do children learn that culture affects human thinking and behavior, and what role does the learning of another language play in this?
- How does children's and young people's understanding of ethnic and national belonging develop and how do stereotypes and prejudices develop?
- What types of studies of intercultural competence can learners undertake at specific ages and stages of cognitive development?
- Which research approaches can enable the reconstruction of cultural learning processes (interviews, discourse analysis, video recording of lessons, etc.)?
- What is characteristic of "cultural learning processes" (changes of patterns of interpretation, self-relativization, capacity for empathy, attempts at change of perspective)?

- What is the relationship between cultural and foreign-language learning?
- Which curricular aims are appropriate for which age groups?
- Which scientifically validated methods can allow the measurement and evaluation of intercultural competence?

In spite of varying premises of research, interdisciplinarity is indispensable for further development within this field. At the same time, it is important for the practice of teaching to develop exercises that systematically foster intercultural competences and make them evaluable (see Caspari & Schinschke, 2009).

SEE ALSO: Assessment of Cultural Knowledge; Cultural Awareness in Multilingual Education; Culture; Intercultural Competence; Intercultural Discourse; Intercultural Understanding With Literary Texts and Feature Films; Language, Culture, and Context

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Intercultural Rhetoric in Language for Specific Purposes

ANA I. MORENO

Introduction

Intercultural rhetoric (IR) is a research field that seeks to identify and explain some of the rhetorical and stylistic accommodations that multilingual writers need to make in order to achieve their communication goals *interculturally*. It is this concern with rhetorical and stylistic accommodations that distinguishes IR studies from other contrastive studies more concerned with potential transfer at lexicogrammatical levels. IR in language for specific purposes (LSP) is a branch of IR which restricts its research concern to texts written by academic and professional writers. It offers a framework for investigating hypotheses about cross-cultural differences in LSP rhetoric and style, that is, contrastive rhetoric (CR) hypotheses, which may explain some of the revisions that multilingual writers need to make in order for their texts to be successful across cultures. Most IR research has focused on multilingual writers communicating in English, mainly because of the special attention given to writing instruction in US universities over the past half-century and of the dominance of English as an international code of communication (Atkinson & Connor, 2008). IR in LSP rests on the premise that when multilingual writers produce texts in English they are likely to transfer rhetorical and stylistic features typical of related LSP texts written in the language and writing culture into which they have been socialized.

These types of hypotheses have been substantiated since the late 1980s by empirical observations of differences in the preferred rhetorical patterns and stylistic features of specialized texts written in English as a first language (L1) and in languages other than English as L1s as well (e.g., Spanish, Chinese, French, Polish, Portuguese, Italian, Ukranian, Russian, German, Bulgarian, Japanese, Arabic, Slovene, Czech; see "Suggested Readings" for some examples). Given its ultimate aim to apply results to language teaching and learning in ESP classrooms, IR research in LSP is not so much interested in comparing