Intercultural citizenship and foreign language education

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This presentation has three main parts. In part one, in order to set the scene for my main argument, I will present some of the principal ideas in recent European discourse about intercultural dialogue. In the second part, I want to consider the whole question of communication, as it is interestingly formulated in the title of the conference: ‘communiquer avec les langues-cultures’. One of my points here will be to extend the notion of communication to that of ‘interaction’, in order to prepare for the final part of my talk. This third and final part will focus upon the ways in which communication can, and should, lead to action in the world. In other words in the course of my talk I want to emphasise that the contemporary emphasis in the European context on intercultural dialogue, especially during the year 2008 which was designated the year of intercultural dialogue, has to be taken as a serious context for language teaching and this has implications for the ways in which language teachers see their work and their possible influence upon learners.

Intercultural dialogue in a European context

Let me start with the European discourse, and with the definition of intercultural dialogue in the Council of Europe’s White Paper:

For the purpose of this White Paper, intercultural dialogue is understood as a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. It requires the freedom and ability to

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express oneself, as well as the willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others.
(Council of Europe: 2008, 9)

What is interesting to note here is how the definition focuses on exchange of views and an exchange of views of course depends upon the communicative competences of those who wish to use the ‘ability to express oneself’ and the ‘capacity to listen’. It is interesting to note here too the phrase ‘willingness to listen’, which is not part of communicative competence, but rather the antecedent to it, the attitude and willingness and openness to others which is a dimension of intercultural competence as we shall see later. The White Paper thus recognises the importance of communicative ability, but in practice focuses in particular upon marginalised and disadvantaged groups, with the implication that these are the groups with whom dominant, majority groups need to make particular contact and exchange. This focus upon the marginalised and disadvantaged becomes evident in the discussion of the role of language in the White Paper:

There are many barriers to intercultural dialogue. Some of these are the result of the difficulty in communicating in several languages. But others concern power and politics: discrimination, poverty and exploitation - experiences which often bear particularly heavily on persons belonging to disadvantaged and marginalised groups - are structural barriers to dialogue.
(Council of Europe: 2008, 12)

In the first part of this quotation, the reference to difficulty in communicating in several languages raises the question of the importance of developing plurilingual competence, the ability to use different languages at different levels of proficiency in different contexts and with different interlocutors. The Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001) is well-known to linguists and language teachers as a repository of reflection on the nature of the necessary linguistic repertoire and how it can be taught, learnt and assessed. The White Paper reminds us that the link with competence in itself is not sufficient, since all the structural barriers to dialogue are likely to undermine the plurilingual competence of people from disadvantaged and marginalised groups. Indirectly, it reminds us that most language teaching and learning takes place in educational institutions which themselves may embody structural barriers for the disadvantaged and marginalised. For example education institutions may not recognise and encourage the development of the linguistic competences in low status languages which
learners from marginalised and disadvantaged groups bring to the educational institution. The languages of children from migrant groups may not be acknowledged as a substantial part of their linguistic capital by the schools which they attend.

Let me take another perspective on the notion of intercultural dialogue, this time from the European Union. In a ‘Resolution on a European agenda for culture’, the Council of the European Union (2007) makes the following statement:

- as regards promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue:
  - encouraging the mobility of artists and other professionals in the culture field;
  - promoting cultural heritage, namely by facilitating the mobility of collections and fostering the process of digitisation, with a view to improving public access to different forms of cultural and linguistic expressions;
  - promoting intercultural dialogue as a sustainable process contributing to European identity, citizenship and social cohesion, including by the development of the intercultural competences of citizens.

What we have here is an interesting emphasis on high culture, on an implicit notion of a European cultural heritage and the importance of facilitating exchange and mobility as a means of maintaining that heritage. It is in the third section that the notion of intercultural dialogue is mentioned explicitly, and related to the complex question of citizenship, identity, and social cohesion. It is implied that intercultural dialogue, however it is defined, is a precondition for the necessary societal changes, including the notion of European identity and citizenship.

What is often called ‘the European idea’ is thus related to the notion of intercultural dialogue, and intercultural dialogue becomes part of the process of political developments. Interestingly, in a body called ‘the European cultural parliament’, made up of artists and cultural animators, this relationship between intercultural dialogue and political options is made explicit. It is a political option for the future, contrasted with past and contemporary options of assimilation and multiculturalism:

Genuine intercultural dialogue provides an alternative to the current political options of assimilation and multiculturalism. It joins parties in a constructive exchange of expressions and views, allowing them to learn from each other realising the common good they will co-create and inhabit together.

(European Cultural Parliament: 2007, 5)
What is not made explicit here is that ‘a constructive exchange of expressions and views’ presupposes communication competence, and this again brings us to the question of language, and plurilingual competence. The Council of Europe’s White Paper addresses the language question more openly than the statements from the European Union, although even the White Paper gives only a little space to the question of language learning:

Language learning helps learners to avoid stereotyping individuals, to develop curiosity and openness to others and to discover other cultures. Language learning helps them to see that interaction with individuals having different social identities and cultures is an enriching experience.

(Council of Europe: 2008, 16)

This is the only place in the White Paper where language learning seems to refer more generally to learners in majority groups, rather than those in disadvantaged and marginalised groups. It is however an important passage because it introduces the notion of ‘interaction’, rather than simply communication. This leads me to the second part of my talk and to the question of the relationship between communication and interaction.

‘Communiquer avec les langues-cultures’ / ‘Discussing with languages-cultures’

In this second part I take my subtitle from the call for papers for this conference. There is an interesting distinction between the French version and the English version, between ‘Communiquer’ and ‘Discussing’, since the latter connotes a more personal engagement, although this may be transferred into French of my connotations for ‘communication’. Irrespective of the accuracy of my connotations, I would like to add to the conference agenda the notion of ‘interaction’ which I take to mean something more than either communication or discussion.

In order to do this, I need to take a step backwards, as it were, and address the question of what we mean by ‘culture’, a notoriously difficult concept, but one which is implicit in the idea of ‘intercultural dialogue’. A well-known metaphor which helps us to grasp the notion of culture is that of the iceberg where only a small proportion of the whole is above the surface of the sea and visible, and in the metaphor, only a small proportion of culture is part of our consciousness. When ‘culture’
is mentioned, then it is the high culture referred to earlier in the document from the European Union together with everyday matters such as food, dress, sports and folk traditions; culture in this sense is often associated with national phenomena, but can also be a matter of regional variation. Below the surface, there is much more to the iceberg of culture, and here we come across matters of implicit assumptions about values, about relationships among people — for example attitudes to the old, or to the young — and of these, the matters which seem to be most deeply ingrained are represented as well below the surface, and scarcely available to conscious introspection. The problem with this metaphor, despite its usefulness as a representation of what is conscious and unconscious, is that it offers simply a list of concepts.

Another way of representing culture is to formulate the rules which people appear to follow in their interactions within a social group. A social group may be small or large, temporary or permanent, anything from a family group to a professional group, to a national group, and even to an international group — for example the group of people who belong to a particular religion. Each group has its rules, some explicit, others known to all but seldom articulated. This way of looking at culture as rule-governed behaviour is interesting because it allows us to make explicit for learners complex concepts below the conscious surface of the iceberg. This is not to say that everyone in a social group follows the rules all the time, since these are descriptive rather than prescriptive rules; they describe tendencies of behaviour within a group. Nobody follows the rules all the time and some people follow the rules hardly at all; the latter are the people we label as ‘asocial’. This is not to say, either, that learners of a foreign language have to conform to the rules of a group of people who speak that language. Just as it is debatable whether language learners should try to imitate native speakers with respect to pronunciation and grammar — a debate which is too complex to enter here — it is also debatable whether learners should have to conform to the behavioural rules, the cultural rules, of native speakers.

To illustrate the question of rules, let me take a simple example. After a long study of English people, Fox (2004) presents the rules which she has observed people following. For example, when people meet at a bus stop, one might say to another ‘Ooh, isn’t it cold?’ and a usual answer might be ‘Mm, yes, isn’t it?’. Contrary to the grammatical structure of these utterances, they are not questions but greetings. They implicitly
mean ‘I’d like to talk to you — will you talk to me?’ and the people involved are following what Fox calls the rules of English ‘weather speak’. Learners can be taught these rules, which are:

- reciprocity rule — it is necessary to respond to this weather speak
- context rule — whether speak can be used as a greeting, as an icebreaker for further talk, as a ‘default’ to fill a gap in a conversation
- agreement rule — it is important to agree with the questioner, or social complexity will ensue.

Not following the rules is certainly an option, but it will inspire doubt and mistrust in our interlocutor, and further dialogue is unlikely. Learners who know these rules — which native speakers would not be able to formulate — can decide whether they follow them or not. In a simple case such as ‘weather speak’, there is little to dissuade them, but in other more complex cases they may feel they do not wish to compromise what they would normally do and feel they are being undermined in their existing identity. This leads me to another issue.

For learners also need to understand another difficult concept, that of social identities: the identities that we acquire through belonging to different social groups. In any intercultural dialogue, a number of social identities are present although some may be dominant and others ignored at a given point in the interaction. As the interaction develops new social identities, or the ones which were hidden, may come to the surface as the nature of the dialogue changes. For example, two people may begin a conversation being most aware that each is from a different country, with a different national identity, and the conversation and interaction will focus upon the similarities and differences in their lives as a Greek person and a French person, for example. In the course of time — during a conversation or as a whole friendship develops — other social identities become dominant, and the two people may speak in terms of their professional identities as language teachers, or their gender identities as women, or their identities as mothers, and so on. In all interaction there are both personal and social identities ‘at work’.

A simple way to introduce learners to the notion of social identities, and to distinguish this concept from personal identity, is the following little exercise. Learners are invited to write - usually in their own language - the phrase ‘I am’ and four or five adjectives which come immediately to mind — ‘tall’, ‘happy’, ‘poor’ etc. Secondly they are invited to write the phrase ‘I am a’ and four or five nouns, again as immediate associations: ‘a girl’, ‘a student’, ‘a daughter’, ‘a Greek’, ‘a Christian’
etc. Their teacher collects examples from learners on a blackboard, for each of the phrases, and then asks the learners to consider the two ways in which people describe themselves, putting aside the distinction between adjectives and nouns. The first phrase usually produces words describing personal identity, or temporary states of mind or body. The second phrase usually produces words describing social identities, the groups to which a person belongs. ‘I am a girl’ is a statement about the social identity of gender, and ‘I am a Greek’ is a statement about the social identity of nationality. There can then be a discussion of how one acquires social identities, of how one learns to be and become for example ‘a girl’ or ‘a Greek’. Learners quickly realise that they were ‘taught’ informally how to be a girl — by their parents, by their peers - and how to be a Greek - by their school and the national curriculum.

In an intercultural dialogue, therefore, of the kind which is envisaged and focused upon in the Council of Europe White Paper - ‘between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage’ - it is ethnic, cultural and religious social identities which are likely to be most prominent in interaction. When ‘a Greek’ and ‘a Norwegian’ are engaged in dialogue, they bring to the situation the ‘iceberg’ of national culture and the rules of behaviour they have acquired in their national group. When ‘a Christian’ engages in intercultural dialogue with ‘a Muslim’, similarly, they bring the concepts and rules they have acquired through their religious belonging, from the social group ‘Christians’ or ‘Muslims’, or some subgroups within them.

Of course, all this is a simplification, but simplifications are necessary for our pedagogical purposes. The complexities of hybrid groups, hybrid identities, and the ‘play’ with identities which have been observed by researchers are important and can be introduced to learners at a more advanced stage, just as we introduce the complexities of grammar or sociolinguistic variations to advanced learners.

What is important for us as teachers is that we find ways to introduce the concepts on complex it is of intercultural dialogue into our work of teaching ‘languages-cultures’/‘langues-cultures’.

Communicate and act with languages-cultures

In this third part I want to pursue further the ways in which language (or languages-cultures) teachers can realise their role in formal edu-
cation, and to consider the European discourse on the intercultural competences which are a precondition for intercultural dialogue. I also want to argue that the foreign language teacher has an important but not exclusive role in developing intercultural competences, and that language teachers can and should look for cooperation with teachers of citizenship, of history, and of other subjects in the school curriculum. Thirdly, I want to suggest that the link with citizenship in particular needs to be pursued because language teaching should not just lead to communication and the exchange of ideas - to intercultural dialogue - but to something more than this: to action in the world, to involvement in civil society, in particular to involvement in international civil society.

In the *Common European Framework of Reference*, it is noted in chapter 5 that interaction requires not just linguistic competences but also ‘general competences’, described as a number of ‘savoirs’. This description was based upon work by Geneviève Zarate and myself (1997) which I developed further and presented as a model of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Knowledge (savoirs)</th>
<th>Education (savoir s’engager)</th>
<th>Attitudes (savoir être)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>savoir comprendre</em></td>
<td>Knowledge about ‘other’ and ‘own’...</td>
<td>Critically evaluate</td>
<td>Openness and curiosity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpret and compare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skills (savoir apprendre/être faire)</td>
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<td>Skills (savoir apprendre/être faire)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acquire new knowledge (and apply in real time)</td>
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The central feature of this representation of intercultural competence - placed symbolically at the centre of the diagram - is the concept of critical cultural awareness or ‘savoir s’engager’, which is crucial to the educational value of teaching intercultural competence, whether in a foreign language teaching or other parts of the curriculum. The choice of
the phrase ‘savoir s’engager’ with its political connotations was delib-erate, and related to the German tradition of ‘politische Bildung’. Critical cultural awareness is defined as:

an ability to evaluate — critically and on the basis of explicit criteria — (some of the) perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries.

What is important here is the emphasis on reflection about whatever learners encounter in other cultures and countries, an emphasis on ‘criti-
cality’. Despite the political connotations of ‘engagement’, what is miss-
ning in this definition is an explicit reference to taking action in the world, as a consequence of learning.

So I turn to the theory of citizenship and the tradition of ‘politische Bildung’ or as it is more frequently known now ‘Demokratielernen’ (Himmelmann, 2006), because in this way of thinking the relationship of edu-
cation to action in the world is made explicit. In the words of one of the main theorists on ‘politische Bildung’, the purposes are:

- Learning to consider personal involvement in political action as desir-
able;
- Learning to recognise democratic forms of action as values (and only democratic forms); these can be called democratic ‘virtues’;
- Acquiring interest in public affairs, being prepared to be interested in political resolutions of social problems (Gagel, 2000)

However, analysis of the theory and of the realisations of the theory in policy documents and curriculum descriptions, shows that education for citizenship, to use a related phrase, focuses on action in the world which is local, regional, and national, but not international (Byram, 2008). The perspective remains essentially inward looking, whereas the perspective of foreign language teaching is outward looking. This is why I consider that an alliance of foreign language education with citizenship education is important in general, and is particularly important in a Eu-
ropean context, where notions of European identity and citizenship are to be found, as we saw in the policy aspirations, but not yet in the prac-
tices of teaching and learning.

In order to consider how foreign language teaching might introduce elements of citizenship education into the classroom, we need to consi-
der ‘content and language integrated learning’:

CLIL is a generic term and refers to any educational situation in which an additional language, and therefore not the most widely used lan-
guage of the environment, is used for the teaching and learning of subjects other than the language itself.
(Marsh and Langel: 2000, 1)

If lessons which are present in a school curriculum as language lessons, labelled for example ‘German’ or ‘English’, focus upon the activities, objectives, and the methods of citizenship education carried out through the medium of the foreign language, then CLIL has been introduced into the foreign language classroom itself. In the following characterisation of CLIL, intended originally to refer to the teaching of for example biology in a foreign language, I have indicated how these characteristics might be realised in the foreign language classroom itself when the focus is upon citizenship education:

The principles of CLIL in the classroom
A successful CLIL lesson should combine elements of the four principles below:

CONTENT
Progression in knowledge, skills and understanding related to specific elements of a defined curriculum.
[drawn from curricula for Citizenship Education]

COMMUNICATION
Using language to learn - whilst learning to use language.
[use of FL as medium for doing Citizenship Education]

COGNITION
Developing thinking skills which link concept formation (abstract and concrete), understanding and language
[as in Intercultural Competence – savoir apprendre, savoir comprendre, savoirs, savoir faire, savoir s’engager]

CULTURE
Exposure to alternative perspectives and shared understandings, which deepen awareness of otherness and self.
[Concepts of ‘otherness’ in Citizenship – international civil society]
(www.cilt.org.uk)

It is the final element which perhaps need some explanation. In citizenship education, learners are encouraged to engage with their own
community, be it simply the people who live in their village or their sector of the city, or more generally an engagement with civil society on a broader scale. Yet that scale is always within the limits of the nation-state. International civil society - for example in the ‘green’ environmental movement - is a perspective which the foreign language classroom can bring to citizenship education. Depending upon their age and level of linguistic and intercultural competence, learners can be encouraged to interact with groups of people in other countries with interests in active citizenship. Class to class exchanges, whether real or virtual, are an ideal medium for this and area well-established tradition in foreign language teaching.

In summary the characteristics which would be crucial to a foreign language education for international, or as I would call it ‘intercultural’, citizenship, include the following:

- Learning more about one’s own country by comparison
- Learning more about ‘otherness’ in one’s own country (especially linguistic/ethnic minorities)
- Becoming involved in activity outside school
- Making class-to-class links to compare and act on a topic in two or more countries

In a talk of this kind, it is not appropriate to try to discuss in detail the changes in curriculum, methods, and aims that language teachers would need to be involved in, in order to realise the vision of language teaching for intercultural citizenship. It is however important to note that such a vision has both practical implications and also implications for the ways in which language teachers are trained, - and for the professional identities of language teachers. For many teachers, the focus is indeed upon the concept ‘language’ in their self-description as ‘language teachers’. What I am proposing here is that teachers would see themselves not only as teachers of language, which of course remains central, but also as teachers of intercultural competence, and as people who will educate those in their charge to be active citizens, engaged in international civil society. This is not to say that language teachers should act alone, or feel solely responsible. Language teaching for intercultural citizenship should be part of citizenship education as a whole, involving corporation with other teachers, and a holistic approach to the curriculum.
Conclusion

As I said at the beginning, this has been an attempt to present the European context in which foreign language teaching takes place, in particular the context of intercultural dialogue and the year of intercultural dialogue, in order to argue for a view of language teaching which recognises its political and social responsibilities.

Put schematically, my argument has been as follows:

- the notion of intercultural dialogue is closely related to the ‘European idea’ of social cohesion and living together; intercultural dialogue presupposes ‘intercultural competence’ and, when institutional barriers are overcome, promotes and enables social interaction at a European and international level;
- foreign language teaching can play a major role in the development of intercultural competence but this means that the objectives of teaching should include intercultural competence and not simply linguistic competences;
- furthermore, foreign language teaching needs to be allied with citizenship education, and the objectives of foreign language teaching need to be further augmented with an emphasis upon teaching and learning which leads to action in the world;
- the foreign language teaching perspective can contribute to a citizenship education focus which goes beyond the national, complementing and improving the objectives of education for citizenship;
- one appropriate method for a combination of foreign language education and citizenship education already exists in the concept of content and language integrated learning, but this needs to be drawn into the foreign language classroom itself;
- all of this has implications for teacher education, and for the professional identities of language teachers, which is a major challenge for all involved.

The title of this conference, and its inspiration, refers to the concept of intercultural dialogue. This is clearly a major issue and recognised as such at the European level in the designation of 2008 as the years of intercultural dialogue, and in the production of the White Paper on intercultural dialogue. Language teachers can no longer simply be teachers of language and linguistic competences. I hope to have shown how they might respond to the challenge.
References


