Assessing intercultural competence in Language Learning and Teaching: a critical review of current efforts

Fred Dervin

> La pensée savante s'est constituée contre la doxa, cette opinion commune dont il fallait se distancier. Et elle est devenue elle-même doxa faite de conformisme intellectuel, de politiquement correct, de moralisme rigide.
> Michel Maffesoli (2006: 5)

Introduction

Although it is not new in itself, the concept of "interculturality" has been flourishing in recent decades in language education and has led to "*intercultural talk*", i.e. an often uncritical, doxic ("taken for granted", cf. Maffesoli's criticism *supra*) and systematic use of the term *intercultural* (Dervin 2009). This chapter endeavours to examine how it is understood and worked upon in the field of language learning and teaching and reflect on how it could be used in higher education. Despite impulsion from the work carried out by the Council of Europe, physical and virtual hypermobilities and the internationalization of higher education; regardless of the multiple research projects and publications on the topic, interculturality does not seem to have been entirely integrated into language teaching and learning in this precise context. I shall deal here specifically with language departments. Nevertheless many of the points raised in the chapter can also be of interest to staff working in language centres.

High levels of criticality and reflexivity are expected from university students (Barnett 1997). Yet, the humboldian and philological traditions, along with the proviso of academic freedom, which allows departments to decide upon their curricula and teachers to introduce objectives which seem best suited for their educational context and which are close to their own research interests, seem to have slowed down the expansion of a critical and reflexive conception of interculturality and the development of intercultural competence in higher education (Jaeger 1995: 267). In most language departments, the concept of interculturality has not had as much success as it deserves. Moreover, even when some departments include interculturality in their programmes, there is no guarantee that the concept is understood in the

same way by teachers themselves and learners: in fact, interculturality is often confused with *cultural*, *trans-cultural* or *multi-cultural* approaches, which do not take on the same goals. Some teachers even assert that they incorporate "interculturality" while in fact what they incorporate is culturalism, i.e. "grammars of cultures" or unfounded facts/stereotypes about the Other.

Some initiatives are exceptions to the rule (cf. *intercultural awareness* in Great Britain, Phipps & Gonzales 2004; Roberts et al. 2001; Kelly et al. 2001 for a review of the state of the art in Europe; Corbett 2003 in England; Dervin 2006a, 2007a in Finland as well as the following chapters). The variety of approaches in these initiatives is so wide and eclectic that it seems difficult to provide a real synthesis.[1] Yet, as the concept of interculturality is complex and tends to receive manifold interpretations, an archaeology of its understanding is necessary more than ever, if we wish to consider its assessment.

Intercultural competence, which is the expected outcome of the insertion of interculturality in language learning and teaching, is a vital competence in our contemporary world, especially (but not exclusively) for specialists involved in mediating between people (diplomats, language teachers, consultants, journalists, translators…). If one introduces this competence in one's teaching, one needs to develop ways of making sure that it is *developed*.

This chapter is theoretical and exploratory in nature. It aims to delineate different ways of working with interculturality and reflect on its assessment in language learning and teaching in higher education. I will present a critical review of intercultural models, and share some reflections on models of competences, which move beyond the canonical definition of intercultural competence, that can help teachers to work on assessing it. To do so, two models of intercultural competence will be introduced: one inspired by the work of Holliday et al. (2004) and one that I have developed myself over the last few years (Dervin 2004, 2006ab, 2007a).

1. An archaeology of approaches to interculturality

Intercultural competence is a concept that seems to be transparent, universally accepted, understood and (ab)used, but which has received many differing definitions inside and outside academia. It is often made to do a

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[1]   Cf. Crawshaw (2005) and Dervin (2006a) have specified these approaches. Anquetil (2006) can also serve as a good introduction.

great deal of work e.g. in contemporary politics. In research it remains relatively fragmented, with little cross-cutting discussion about methodology.

Over decades of research on the competence, several phrases have been used (often interchangeably (alas!)) to describe it: "cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, multicultural competence, transcultural competence, global competence (…)" (Deardorff 2004: 32). It is so confusing that I have proposed the concept of *proteophilic competences* (the appreciation of the diverse diversities of the self and the other; Dervin 2006b, cf. below) to distance myself from current scientific and political use of the concept. Before that, every time I talked about intercultural competence, other scholars assumed that we were "on the same wavelength", even though our approaches differed.

An archaeology of how interculturality is conceptualised in education is thus necessary in order to position oneself and make sure that when one uses the concept, those who listen or read, share a certain number of theoretical, epistemological and philosophical elements. In this chapter, in order to take stock of the conceptual and theoretical work interculturality is meant to do, I have chosen to concentrate on two of the anthropologist N.P. Pieterse's three ideal-type perspectives on culture (2004: 42), which are very useful in synthesizing how interculturality is understood and theorised. The model is composed of 1. Cultural differentialism, and 2. Cultural *mélange* or mixing. To these two components, I have added a third one which I call Janusian approaches to interculturality.

The first component, *cultural differentialism*, is based on the principle that people are different because of their "cultural belongings/baggage" and that objective descriptions of people's behaviours, thoughts, opinions… can be provided. According to Pieterse, differentialists (*culturalists* or *objectivists* in my "parlance") establish that the world is "a mosaic of immutably different cultures and civilizations" (2004: 55). In this model, cultural differences are defined as objective data allowing individuals to understand the behaviours of others (Abdallah-Pretceille 1999: 56). Pieterse (2004: 47) criticizes the differentialist approach by claiming that the image of the mosaic is erroneous as it is composed of fixed discrete pieces, whereas human experience is fluid and open-ended. For A. Sen (2006: xvi), people are "miniaturized" as they are reduced to one single identity, that of a "culture" which is, in turn, reduced to national and geographical boundaries. This approach to differentiation has been shown to lead to stereotypical discourses and positive or negative representations on the Self and the Other (cf. Boli & Elliott's "façade diversity" (2008). Most scholars involved in

researching intercultural competence seem to agree with this last argument, yet, as we shall see in the third category (Janusian approaches), many of them use e.g. *culturespeak* (Hannerz 2001) or discourses of single and unique identity which tend to contradict their criticisms of differentialism.

The second component is based on the notion of "*mélange*" or "mixing". According to Pieterse (2004: 52), societies constantly live through open-ended, ongoing mixing, which leads to *diverse diversities* in terms of habits and artifacts, discourses and opinions within the same geographical boundaries (ibid., cf. also Abdallah-Pretceille 1999). This does not just refer to the fact that most societies contain "foreign guests" or "representatives of other religions" but to the idea that WE are all diverse. The anthropologist adds that, even though mixing is something that is quite evident in everyday forms of being, it is not something which is easily accepted. In research, this model is increasingly present through paradigms such as Martine Abdallah-Pretceille's "*humanisme du divers*" (a subjectivist approach to interculturality), *hermeneutical interculturality* (cf. the *Nordic circle of hermeneutical interculturality* represented amongst others by Dahl et al. 2006) or *proteophilia* (Dervin 2007a), which consider interculturality, and the related concepts of *culture* and *identity*, to be intersubjective co-constructions and thus experiences as *mélanges*. Intersubjectivity emphasizes the fact that individuals are not free from all when they interact and that they cannot identify freely – and more importantly that people can lie, manipulate discourses... The works of Adrian Holliday et al. (2004), Anwei Feng (2009) and Gavin Jack (2009) are also very close to this approach. The latter, for instance, argues that: "*epistemologically, I believe that a 'dimensional' approach to culture, which allows us to plot or map representatives of national cultures onto some kind of continuum, presents students with unhelpfully fixed categories of analysis that essentialize culture and divest it of its key processual and political contingencies*" (Jack 2009: 96).

The last category of interculturality, which I termed Janusian in reference to the two-faced God, seems to be increasingly present in studies on interculturality in fields such as intercultural communication, language education, cross-cultural psychology… As such a Janusian approach to interculturality is based on a misconception: on the one hand, the researchers defend and put forward the changeability and unstable nature of cultures, identities, "subjects" (i.e. the diverse diversities of each and every one of us), but on the other hand, through e.g. their corpus analyses, which resort to quantification or "soft" discourse analysis or contents analysis, they

categorise study participants into national, religious, ethnic groups – and this limits the co-constructive aspects (Dervin 2009).[2]

It is now clear at the end of this archeology that positioning one's research in one of these approaches cannot but have an impact on how concepts such as culture, identity, interculturality and intercultural competence are theorized and put into practice and is thus a necessary move. Two models derived from the mélange/subjectivist component will be presented in the last section of this chapter.

2. A critical review of intercultural competence

Hundreds of definitions of intercultural competence have been given by researchers worldwide (cf. Deardorff 2004 who provides a synthesis; cf. also her *SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (2009); Byram 1997; Sercu 2004; Guilherme 2000…[3]).

The most exhaustive and influential definition of intercultural competence is that of Michael Byram (1997 and later). Byram has defined five *savoirs* (1997: 50-53), or components of intercultural competence, which are complementary to a language learner's communicative competence (the author actually calls it intercultural communicative competence). Byram has also been involved in the influential Council of Europe's *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* (www.coe.int/lang). His model has a significant advantage compared to others: it sets clear objectives. However, as I shall comment upon later on, his *savoirs* are sometimes contradictory and/or based on unconvincing claims.

For many of the other definitions of intercultural competence, there is some sort of *prêt-à-penser* ("*ready-to-think*") on interculturality. Several misunderstandings, one might even say misconceptions, seem to influence most of the definitions of intercultural competence, and have an impact on their implementation in language learning and teaching.

First of all, the Norwegian anthropologist Unni Wikan points to the "myth" that one encounters in many definitions of interculturality – that of the encounter *between cultures* – when she writes: "I am struck by people's

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[2] For a very good example of Janusianism, cf. B. Hansen's unstable and politically correct discourse on diverse diversities (http://www.afs-fr.org /downloads/files/FRA/ La_grande_partie_cachée_de_l_iceberg.pdf) after a conference on student mobility in 2008. The famous objectivist-culturalist M. Bennett was one of the plenary speakers.

[3] Cf. Fantini, A.E. (2006). *Assessment tools of intercultural communicative competence*. http://www.sit.edu/SITOccasionalPapers/feil_appendix_f.pdf. Cf. also Michael Byram and Geneviève Zarate (1997).

proclivity to talk as if culture were endowed with mind, feeling, and intention. Nor is this just a layperson's way of speaking. Academics, anthropologists included, are as likely as anyone else to talk this way – as if culture had taken on a life of its own" (Wikan 2002: 83). As the anthropologist asserts, one does not meet cultures, but individuals. This "quasibiolisation" of cultures (Hannerz 2001: 42) is present in most definitions of intercultural competence, e.g.: "*the willingness to engage with* **the foreign culture**" (Sercu), "*critical engagement with* **the foreign culture** *under consideration and one's own*" (Byram)…

The second misconception is the impression that one gets, when reading many definitions of intercultural competence, that one's culture (and "identity") and that of the other are singular. This is highlighted by Gabrielle Varro (2007: 36), who explains that:

> Even if one sticks to the restrictive meaning of "encounter", one of the problems that the concept of "interculturality" poses is that it leads to the idea of combination, which, in turn, rests on the postulate that these objects that we refer to as cultures, before having "met" each other, would have been untouched by any *mélange* (my translation).

The ideas of the postmodern, hypermodern (Aubert 2004) and liquid (Bauman 2001) paradigms from the last decades, not only postulate that the concepts of culture and identity are outdated and cannot be used for analysis, but also propose that it would be better to substitute them with concepts that could help to translate the ever-changing nature and multiple constructions experienced by individuals. Martine Abdallah-Pretceille (1996) and Michel Maffesoli (1995) have put forward respectively the terms *culturality* and *identification* in order to signal all these diverse "modalities of presence in the world" (Hess & Weigand 2006: XII). Therefore, the feeling of cultural homogeneity, which emerges from some definitions, is "based on the positivist paradigm and more globally inspired by mechanistic scientism" (Boumard 2006: 1). This feeling seems to suggest a super-adaptation when "inter-culturality" takes place (we might even go so far as to say acculturation: one supposedly becomes the other) by one of the interlocutors and thus the acquisition of fixed cultural elements which allow a language user to communicate with a "native of the culture" (e.g. in terms of non-verbality, attitude). But it is more complicated than this: on a daily basis, we all have to interact with very different people from our very own environments.

It is interesting to note that, although language educationalists often refer to other fields in their writings (anthropology, sociology,

philosophy…), these ideas have not really gained strength in many of the researchers' conceptualisation of intercultural competence over the last decades – or if they have, the discourses that surround them are often unsteady.

Another misunderstanding is rooted in the absence of the interlocutor in most definitions of intercultural competence (Ruben 1989: 234), which makes them quite monological and individualistic. Most definitions only mention the "user" of the competence and ignore the influence of the interlocutor and the context of interaction on acts of interaction. In fact, any individual can be absolutely "interculturally competent" but s/he may be easily troubled by the lack of motivation of the other, her/his bad intentions, her/his language skills…. The integration of these acts of co-construction of discourse and interaction seems vital in the definition of intercultural competence. Basing her reflections on a similar conclusion, Tania Ogay suggests that we use the term *intercultural dynamics* (2000: 53) rather than *competence* to describe this double responsibility and engagement.

This is also related to another misconception: what I call the "researcher's naïve belief in her/his subjects' honesty". Surprisingly enough, there are quite many definitions of intercultural competence which are based on what people have to say about what they feel about Others, what they have learnt about others… and not on *how* they say it. What Barker & Galasinski (2001: 3) from the field of cultural studies have to say about culture is inspiring: "it is best not to pursue the question "what is culture?" but rather to ask about how we talk about culture and for what purposes". People have "*une part d'ombre*" (a shadow side) as Michel Maffesoli (2002) would say, which makes them manipulate, lie to others, etc. This cannot be ignored when we deal with something as basic and primordial as interculturality.

As we all know, there is a lack of reliability between acts and discourse / discourse and acts: an individual may behave in an "appropriate" manner in a certain situation, though he/she may be disgusted by his/her behaviour (cf. Derrida, 1976: 52; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2002: 79). In his recent criticisms of his model of intercultural competence and the assessment of its components (*savoirs, savoir-faire, savoir-être…*), Byram (2008: 222) fails to pinpoint this important element: the scholar rightly claims that openness to others, critical self-awareness and self analysis are basic values in education, yet there is no way we can prove or test (or trust) if somebody *genuinely* believes in them. Therefore assessing these *savoir-être* summatively is, to me, impossible. There is simply not enough evidence as all we often have is discourse, which cannot but be unstable, co-

constructed, changeable… (cf. Dervin 2009). Students should be made aware of this vital aspect of interculturality – and of any act of human interaction.

Finally, I share the position of G. Zarate (2003: 113), who makes a point of talking about intercultural competences in the plural, as they can be found to be in various stages of unfixed development. In fact, the competences are unstable in the sense that they are based not only on cognition, but also on affection and emotions. Therefore, as stated previously, a person who is "normally" competent in certain contexts may be very incompetent in other situations. Zarate (ibid.) adds that intercultural competences are not always calibrated with language skills and that an excellent command of a foreign language doesn't automatically lead to good intercultural competences and vice versa. Zarate also states that repeated contacts with citizens of a particular country do not mean perfect mastery of intercultural competences.

3. On assessing intercultural competence

Our worlds are engraved with the "soft barbarity" of assessment (Le Goff 1999) – a common practice in teaching – because one cannot but assess as "learners tend not to pay attention to what is not assessed and therefore demand that good assessment tools be developed" (Sercu 2004: 74, cf. also Søderberg 1995). Yet, most scholars who have worked on intercultural competence have warned against its assessment (Byram 1997; Kramsch 1993; Zarate & Gohard 2004): how could we possibly achieve the four criteria of reliability, validity, fairness and consistency (Tagliante 1994) for interculturality?

Many scholars and practitioners have tried to implement methods for assessing intercultural competences in their teaching. First of all, there are *standard cultural tests* which consist of multiple-choice questions that are easy to administer and correct (Hashem 1995: 1; cf. Ayosso in this volume), but which cannot provide information or evidence on somebody's intercultural competence because they only test factual knowledge, which is sometimes generalised and stereotypical – especially when it refers to anthropological culture. Assessment tools, such as diagnostic scales (cf. for ex. Fantini 2006; Allen & Herron 2003) which are composed of Likert-type items, have also been largely criticised. Ruben casts doubts on these tests, stating that: "the validity of data of this type rests fundamentally on the

presumption that respondents have the desire and ability to engage in valid self-assessment" (Ruben 1989: 231).

Some scholars and practitioners have put forward the following quantitative and qualitative methods of assessment:

> - "Case studies, interviews, analysis of narrative diaries, self-report instruments observations by others/host culture, judgment by self and others" (Deardoff 2006)
> - "Surveys, evaluation forms (…) reflective diary entries, critical incident reports, individual and group interviews…" (Jackson 2005)

Michael Byram suggests working from a portfolio that he calls an "autobiography of intercultural experiences", which he describes in the following manner (2005: 14):

> It is problem-focused, it only deals with experiences which reflect difference and there may be a tendency to focus on difficulties rather than pleasurable experiences, but "key experiences" are not necessarily difficult or problematic.

Byram finally adds that it (ibid.): "requires a high degree of literacy and analytical skill", which many learners do not master because autonomous learning and the acquisition of competences of analysis – and as paradoxical as it may be – require training.

All in all, many criticisms have been targeted at these attempts. Let's have a look at some of those identified by Rubben (1989: 235). First of all, he states that if teachers ask students to keep diaries and logs, there is a subconscious belief that learners are honest and blunt about their experiences, while intercultural learning usually takes place through "vagabond learning" which the learner may not always want to share. Moreover, the analysis of the portfolios or diaries which is carried out by the teacher not only leads to big ethical problems, but also to problems of validity, interpretation and objectivity. Also, *in vivo* observation of the students, for example, is problematic in terms of reliability and validity (which are essential criteria for assessment) as it tends to be subjective, co-constructed and influenced by many exterior factors such as the observer's tiredness, emotions and/or representations (cf. Gillespie & Cornish 2009). Observation as such is always a construction of knowledge (Bensa 2008).

4. New approaches to intercultural competence and assessment in higher education: two proposals

This section examines two (inter-)subjectivitist models, which could be used for the development of intercultural competence[4] for language students in higher education. The methods of assessment are mostly formative and based not only on self-assessment and peer assessment, but also on potential summative assessment of the acquisition of taught savoir-faire (ex. competences of discursive and enunciative analysis) by a "guide" (e.g. the teacher).

Among the various approaches to intercultural competence presented in the first section, the subjectivist/*mélange* approach seems to be the most ethically acceptable alternative. The approach is based on an examination of the co-construction of identities and cultures and fully identifies itself in hypermodern and postmodern analyses of our contemporary worlds and concentrates above all on the development of *savoir-faires* and *savoir-analyser* (competences of analysis). *Savoir-agir*, which derives from the preceding savoirs, could be taken into consideration only for the domains that are of interests here: university contexts (e.g. a learner has to prepare an argumentative presentation with a foreigner or take part in a forum on the internet in French as a lingua franca with students from other countries), contexts of student mobility[5] and professional contexts (traineeship). Other domains of interaction such as personal or familial contexts shouldn't be considered.

The first model which I find useful as it can be used for self-, peer- and group-assessment but also in some ways for summative assessment (related academic savoir-faires can be assessed), is derived from Holliday, Hyde & Kullman's 2004 book *Intercultural Communication: An Advanced Resource Book.* Though the authors do not present the following model as a model of intercultural competence, to me it can work as such. The model is based on the three essential keywords of identity, otherization (how one turns an *Other* into an *Other*), and representation. The summary of these items on pp. 48-49 of the book can help set learning objectives and offer some tools for self-reflexion:

IDENTITY
Seek a deeper understanding of individual people's identity by

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[4] I prefer to talk about the development of the competence rather than its acquisition as it is a fundamental "human" and "societal" competence which every one of us makes use of on a daily basis – successfully or not.

[5] Literature on various aspects of academic mobility is flourishing, cf. Dervin (2007c) and Byram & Dervin (2008).

a) avoiding preconceptions
b) appreciating complexity
c) not overgeneralising from individual instances.

Achieve this by employing bracketing to put aside your preconceptions, thick description to enable you to see complexity, and an appreciation of emergent data to signal the unexpected.

1. respond to people according to how you find them rather than according to what you have heard about them
2. avoid easy answers about how people are. Bracket – put aside simplistic notions about what is 'real' or 'unreal' in your perception of 'another culture'
3. appreciate that every society is as complex and culturally varied as your own.
4. learn to build up thick descriptions of what happens between you and the others – to work out to communicate as you go along.
5. while respecting whatever people say about their own culture, take what they sat as evidence of what they wish to project rather than as information about where they come from.
6. take what people say about their culture as a personal observation which should not be generalized to other people who come from the same background.
7. understand how people are creating and indeed negotiating their cultural identity in the very process of communicating with us.
8. appreciate that you are creating and negotiating your own cultural identity in the process of communicating with us.
9. appreciate that the creation and negotiation of cultural and personal identity are the same thing.

OTHERIZATION
Seek a deeper understanding of the prejudices, preoccupations and discourses which lead you to otherize. Use this to enable bracketing and to manage your own role in communication.

10. avoid falling into the culturalist trap of reducing people to less than they are – in the same way as we must avoid racial and sexist traps.
11. be aware that what happens between yourself and others is influenced very much by the environment within which you are communicating and your own preoccupations.
12. become aware of your own preoccupations in order to understand what it is that people from other backgrounds are responding to.
13. avoid being seduced by previous experience and the exotic
14. monitor your own language and be aware of the destructive, culturalist discourses we might be conforming to or perpetuating.

REPRESENTATION
Seek a deeper understanding of the representations of the foreign Other which are perpetuated by society.

15. be aware of the media, political and institutional influences in our own society which lead us to see people from other cultural backgrounds in a certain way.
16. see through these images and fictions when we encounter people from other cultural background, and always try to consider alternative representations.

17. be aware of dominant discourses which are easily perpetuated by the media, and which lead us to 'think-as-usual' that familiar images of the foreign Other are 'normal'
18. be aware that even images projected by sensitive, intellectual sources can seduce our own sensitivities and intellects into thinking that they are 'true'
19. although sensationalism in the media is something we know about and guard against, we need to appreciate how deeply it exists in our traditional views of the foreign other.

My own model of proteophilic competences (i.e. the appreciation of the diverse diversities of the self and the other, Dervin, 2007ab, 2008, 2009) is in a way very similar to the previous. Three key elements have been used for their definition:

> - The importance of relationships in interaction is taken into account in the co-construction of identities and images of who one wants to be, how one presents oneself and the other in interaction.
> - Emphasis is also laid on the fact that each individual constructs themselves and that "in any act of interaction, it is well known that one never communicates with the person as s/he really is, but with a representation which we have of him/her and his/her groups of belonging, just as this person brings in the interaction act her own representations" (Ogay, 2000: 166). The notions of representations and stereotypes are also at the heart of the various analyses that are proposed to students so that they learn to recognize these mechanisms of construction in their own discourse and in that of the other.
> - The concept of "the fantasy of Unicity" (Maffesoli, 1995, i.e. the doxic idea that each of us has a unique self inside of them and that belonging to one's group makes us the "same") as well as the concept of "dissociative acts"/diversity of the self borrowed from psychology ("situations in which I am somebody and somebody else at the same time" Boumard, 2006: 30[6]) are central. Through these concepts, the approach requires that the students decentre and look at themselves.

Influenced by postmodern thought, theories of enunciation and dialogism (cf. Dervin 2009; Gillespie & Cornish 2009; Linell 2009), the model is composed of three components: two *savoir-faires* and one *savoir-réagir/agir* and form a whole. There is no progression (no "levels") and it is open, flexible and should be reworked and adapted to learners' needs. Every component (1-3) is expressed in the first person so that learners can use the model for self-assessment. One solution to each problem raised by the model is proposed so that learners may check their actions/reactions/strategies for

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[6] Cf. Dervin, 2007b for an adaptation of the concept in intercultural communication.

adequacy, and decide upon objectives for themselves. The sections that follow the components (a to c) suggest reflections and questionings that are necessary in order to enrich the competence.

1. Savoir-faire I: Detect identification

I am fully aware that every individual (myself included) is multiple and complex but that every (inter-)locutor can adapt their discourse to contexts and/or interlocutors by presenting a group or a national identity in order to please, confirm a representation or defend themselves. I know how to note and analyse pieces of evidence of identification in my own discourse as well as in the other's discourse.

As a consequence, whenever possible, I try not to present myself or my interlocutor through national images, stereotypes, generalisations and exaggerations…

a.

Individual plurality is not always visible because, in any context of interaction, one needs to select an image of the self (and of the other) and use it. Moreover, classifying by means of nationality is very common in intercultural encounters (it is often a starting point, an *overture*). Also, I need to remember that telling somebody that they are using auto-/hetero-stereotypes ("We Finns are like this") can be problematic because I can come across as moralizing and/or unpleasant. Who is entitled to forbid somebody from using a national auto-stereotype? What can thus be done in such a situation? I can play the stereotype-game, cut the conversation short, change topics, or discuss the stereotypes with my interlocutor. With hindsight, I can reflect on why I, or somebody else, used stereotypes in interaction and how they were formulated.

2. Savoir-faire II: Paying attention to discourses

I am able to listen to discourses that I come across (mine as well as others') especially when they are potentially ethnocentric, xenophobic, racist but also exotic and xenophilic. I know how to ease such discourses by means of linguistic markers such as modalities and be as explicit as possible by reformulating. I also try to avoid "interculturally correct", naive or contradictory discourse on the *self* and the other such as "I have no stereotypes", "I don't believe in stereotypes but Finns are…" etc.

b.

This is where language skills can have a big impact on intercultural competences (mine and that of my interlocutor) because one cannot always control all the meanings and nuances in a foreign language and one can also shock one's interlocutor without even knowing (s/he may not even be showing their real feelings in relation to this situation/context). What strategies could I use in such instances without putting myself at risk?

Secondly, the other can have a role to play in my use of language, with stereotypes being a case in point. For instance, there might be times when my avoidance of stereotypes is limited by an interlocutor whose position is hierarchically higher. How might I behave in an ethical manner in such a situation and try not to resort to stereotypes?

Finally, I should bear in mind that there is a potential gap between discourses and acts - in other words, I am aware that discourse can be contradicted by actions and vice-versa.

3. Savoir-réagir/agir: Controlling one's emotions/behaviours

In delicate and difficult situations, situations of misunderstanding and disagreement, I make an effort to remind myself that individuals are human beings and that they have emotions, feelings, experience bad/good moods, personal problems… which influence

their reactions. As such, I try not to draw quick and culturalist conclusions which may harm my relationships with others.

c.

How might I therefore control my emotions in difficult situations? What strategies could be used to avoid conflicts or worsening situations?

How might I go beyond feelings of *déjà-vu*, *déjà-vécu*, *déjà-dit…* and phenomena of polyphony which may affect my relationships with others (e.g. a person reminds me of someone that I do not like either because of her/his physical appearance or his/her accent in a foreign language)?

Conclusion

(…) pour dire, il faut savoir médire. Il n'y a pas de "*pars construens*" que si existe une "*pars destruens*". En la matière, détruire les idées convenues et autres conformismes de pensées qui sont, justement, le fondement des multiples crispations dogmatiques. Ou qui, tout simplement, confortent les diverses paresses intellectuelles, les lieux communs, et autres expressions des bons sentiments.

Michel Maffesoli (2006: 8)

The article has allowed us to look at the miscellaneous interpretations of intercultural competence contained in the literature on interculturality and especially in language education. The models that were proposed in the last section represent examples of learning/teaching objectives of interculturality, which can be set for a whole university course, and can be constantly remodelled, transformed, criticised… The assessment of the competence should combine formative and summative assessment through a panoply of methods, contexts and actors. If tools such as discourse analysis or dialogism are used to complement these approaches (cf. Dervin forth.), the competence can be assessed summatively, as one would expect university students to be able to demonstrate that they have acquired such tools to provide "objective" analysis of data.

This has some consequences on lecturers, because they also have to recognise and accept that they are not the absolute masters in lecture halls: they must also be aware of his/her emotions, representations, contradictory discourses… Furthermore, they can no longer assume that they are always able to judge the development of learners' intercultural competence by simply examining their written or oral speech, because it is unstable, ambiguous and calculated (i.e. students sometimes offer ready-made answers to please the teacher). Teachers can however guide learners in the acquisition of *savoir-faire* and *savoir-analyser* which will allow them to reflect and act.

Intercultural competence is not permanent, "for life", and its practice and learning never end. If we accept the idea of life-long learning (a notion which is adulated by the EU), interculturality is without a doubt one of its best incarnations because it is one of the domains where "man cannot but reach imprecision" (Jules Supervielle). The new approaches to interculturality presented in this chapter are part of the necessary "*pars destruens*" in the "*pars construens*" (cf. Maffesoli *supra*) that researchers should endeavour to create.

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