

LANGUAGE	PEDAGOGY
PRINCIPLES	PRACTICE

LP3 VOLUME 6 APRIL 2015

*THE BULLETIN OF RESEARCH, TEACHING AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY
FROM THE SUSSEX CENTRE FOR LANGUAGE STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX, UK*

**Special edition:
Symposium on Intercultural Communicative Competence
in Action**

Sussex Centre for Language Studies, 12th January 2015

The symposium explored the role of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in language teaching and teacher education at university level with the objective that participants gain a clear understanding of the relationship between theory and research into ICC and how these might relate to practice.

Keynote speakers: [Mike Byram](#) (Emeritus Professor, University of Durham) and Dr [Will Baker](#) (University of Southampton).

In the opening session, Professor **Mike Byram** presented a brief overview of some of the concepts associated with the day's theme and their origins and history. This introduction formed the basis for a discussion of current debates and discussions in the field, and what 'the field' includes. The third element was an analysis of what research and (curriculum) development needs and opportunities exist and how they might be addressed by teachers in their practice as well as researchers in theirs.

SCLS web page on the symposium, with links to presentation slides:
<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/languages/research/icc>

Cultural awareness and intercultural awareness through English as a lingua franca: from research to classroom practice

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The rapid expansion and wide scale use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has resulted in much rethinking of established concepts in applied linguistics. This has included intercultural communicative competence and its relevance to settings where the links between language use and cultural practices and identities are often highly fluid and complex. In this presentation the appropriateness of cultural awareness (CA), a key feature of intercultural communicative competence, and the related concept of intercultural awareness (ICA) are considered in relation to ELF communication. This is combined with an exploration of the influence CA and ICA have had on classroom practices.

In particular, it is argued that CA and ICA are more prevalent in pedagogic theory, and to a lesser extent language policy, than they are in practice. While the cultural dimension to language learning is now fairly mainstream, where elements of CA and ICA are translated into the classroom they typically take the form of comparisons between national cultures, often in essentialist forms. There is still little evidence of classroom practices that deal with the fluid ways cultures and languages are related in intercultural communication, especially for ELF or other languages used on a global scale.

Focusing on the 'I' in ICC: the importance of accounting for socio-psychological orientations

Jules Winchester

The study on which this paper is based explores the importance of accounting for individuals' socio-psychological orientations (i.e. how individuals relate to their sociocultural context) to perceived linguistic and cultural norms and practices in the development and assessment of ICC. The underlying premise of the study is that critical cultural and language awareness is crucial to the development of ICC. There is also an assumption that critical awareness can be assessed on the basis of awareness of the existence of the language-culture nexus (i.e. how language and culture relate to each other), as well a conscious understanding of the role of culturally based forms, practices and frames in intercultural communication, and an ability to use the understanding in practice.

Taking a discourse analytic and narrative inquiry approach to the analysis of semi-structured interviews with students from a General English class, this paper considers that an apparent lack of (development in) critical awareness may be due to a lack of understanding of culturally based forms, etc., but may also be due to individuals' socio-psychological orientations, evident in their positioning in relation to perceived linguistic and cultural norms and practices, and in their identity claims. The implication is that studies of ICC, and attempts to develop ICC in a language learning context, should take account of individuals' socio-psychological orientations to a greater extent than currently appears to be the case.

The application of discourse ethics to intercultural communication, and lessons for the classroom

Simon Williams

It is generally recognised that linguistic competence is a necessary but not sufficient component of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (eg Byram 1997: 10). Language learners may be able to produce culturally-appropriate functional language, for example, but fail to grasp its deeper significance. Moreover, essentialist classroom practices may only encourage learners' transactional behaviour and reinforce cultural stereotypes held by both learners and the status quo.

Where they exist, multicultural settings outside the classroom, which could include the Internet, might provide alternative, more challenging, teaching and learning opportunities in the form of learner fieldwork. And by revealing evidence of a 'communicative', discovery agenda vs mere 'strategic' communication or information gathering, the application of Habermas's (1984) discourse theory to learners' field-related discourse would be another means of gauging its effectiveness. Taking three learner case studies, comprising data from summer pre-session course student journals, questionnaires and interviews, I analyse the characteristics of the learners' communication styles in relation to their field activities, and consider implications for pedagogic practice. I argue that this fieldwork approach, where available, better facilitates the development of ICC in the classroom.

References

- Byram, M (1997) Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters
Habermas, J (1984) The Theory of Communicative Action. Vols. I & II. T. McCarthy (trans), Boston: Beacon [German, 1981]
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Does it make a difference? Introducing ICC focused materials in the language classroom

Silvia Taylor and Viviana Mockler

Our students are encountering problems during the year abroad. How can we help them overcome Culture Shock? Research has suggested that Intercultural Competence (ICC) can be the answer. In our context we have very little class time to dedicate exclusively to ICC, we have therefore decided to integrate ICC acquisition with language learning and we have produced some language learning materials with an ICC focus. In our small scale research we have tried to find out if ICC can be successfully integrated in the language classroom and we can say that the results so far are encouraging. We asked our students to fill in questionnaires before and after using some ICC focused materials in our classes, in an attempt to find out whether there was a measurable change in their knowledge of the target language culture. It is hoped this might inspire other practitioners to find a way to include ICC in their own language teaching context.

Ethnocentrism in TESOL: How should culture be integrated into the TESOL certificate?

Jennifer Book

Native and Non-native trainee teachers receive the same training on TESOL programmes in Western countries. These programmes are designed with the idea of using a specific methodology to teach English to small, multilingual classes. Little consideration is given to the millions of EFL/ESOL students that these trainees will teach/work with. It also reflects a disregard for the differences in socio-economic conditions, educational ideologies etc. With this in mind, I set out to examine the problems associated with the current courses through interviews with groups of teachers who have had the same training but different work contexts.

Raising Intercultural Awareness in a General English Class

James Greenough

This short presentation gave an overview of a pilot project based on Intercultural awareness and communication (ICC) that was done with a general English class for the first time in the Autumn term, 2014. This consisted of project work which took place over 8 weeks with a class at upper intermediate level. The presentation looked at the initial setting up of the project work, described the context and process of the work done by the class, and briefly discussed the results of the project in terms of the implications for any future project work.

The initial setting up of the project involved a number of discussion tasks aimed at getting students to exchange their different cultural experiences in order to raise their awareness regarding ICC issues. Tasks included looking at dress code and the cultural norms and expectations that underpin this, discussing traffic rules and behaviour, and seeing how such rules are often interpreted differently depending on the context and culture involved. Stereotypes were discussed as relating to each student's country, and explanations were sought regarding how and why such (usually distorted) views had come about. Finally, situational settings (as discussed in the entry here by Jeremy Page) were looked at to see how language, and the language choices one makes, are tied closely to specific cultural norms and ideas of appropriacy.

Having spent some time on the above in an attempt to sensitise students to cultural issues, the class was then divided into small groups and each group was asked to think of an aspect of culture they would like to find out more about. Each group then created survey questions, or hypothetical situations, to ask other groups of people through face to face interviews. The questions were based around situational responses ('what would you say/do...?') and the students would then compare the different responses they got. Based on the action research done, the students produced three assessed pieces of work; a written report summarising their findings, a class presentation outlining their results, and an individual piece of reflective writing giving their thoughts about the project and evaluating their progress.

A further on-going task, which had been set up early in the term, was for students to keep diaries where they could record their daily actions, and any observations and reflections they had on the English specific culture they saw around them. This was especially useful for the

students where they noticed items which were salient due to the fact that they contrasted with equivalent but different aspects from their own familiar culture of origin. As part of this diary keeping, students were also encouraged to keep listening logs (Kemp 2008). These got the students to focus on recording the speech they heard each day, either as interactive listening which happened along with their own speaking in everyday encounters, or in the role of eavesdropper, where students listened in to other people's talk.

Overall, integrating aspects of culture and communication into what had hitherto been a purely language based project produced some very positive results. Student engagement and motivation was high and they all saw the benefits that the project had on their English. In terms of the more culturally focused project aims, the project was less of a success. Although students did gain a greater awareness as to the importance of cultural norms in language learning, this seemed to be at quite a superficial level. A key component to achieving this aim was for students to be able to use the diary writing as a tool to identify and record aspects of culture. Unfortunately, not all students kept diary entries, and those who did kept few observations that related to language or cultural aspects. Unless this is done more effectively, students will not have any of the basic elements of culture before them with which they can then reflect on in order to draw some inferences as to what underpins such elements. It is hoped that in future, if the diary writing can be integrated more successfully, then extracts of certain diary entries of interest could be exploited through classroom discussions. In this way, the student diaries can then be a vehicle towards students gaining a greater understanding of both cultural and language aspects, and become a key element in the project work.

Reference

Kemp, J. (2008) Listening Log: motivating autonomous learning. *ELT Journal*, 64/4: 385 - 395

Exploring critical incidents in the classroom

Catherine Rogers

If intercultural competence is primarily a description relevant to individuals from different countries, the term then excludes intercultural problems that may exist within national boundaries. It is these *internal differentiations* that are often more significant than the cultural cohesion within those national boundaries (Rathje, 2007).

This brief talk describes critical incidents from one EFL classroom, focusing on both Intercultural Communicative incidents, and, more interestingly, **Intracultural** Communicative ones. What is the role of the teacher when these incidents occur? How can both students and teachers make the most of these when they do occur in the classroom?

Reference

Rathje, S. (2007) 'Intercultural Competence: The Status and Future of a Controversial Concept' *Journal for Language and Intercultural Communication*. 7(4) 254–266.

Chinese learners' use of 'English' names and what it reveals about ICC

Laura Mark

In this talk, I gave a brief description of the findings of a qualitative study entitled '*Identity and interaction in second language acquisition: An investigation of Chinese learners' use of 'English' names*'. The study was carried out as part of a Masters dissertation, and has shed light on some social and personal aspects of this practice, which has become so widespread among EFL/ESL learners and yet is still little understood. As the title suggests, the focus was mainly on personal accounts and the implications of the practice on students' sense of identity as well as Intercultural Communicative Competence.

What the study highlighted was that sociocultural and psychological factors which influence learners' selection of 'English' can differ greatly from the expectations of native-speakers of English; this could lead to inadvertent *positioning* and miscommunication of the image of the self, a fundamental basis for any interpersonal communication. Challenges of exploring the practical application of such findings were also discussed during this talk. The audience response confirmed that there is a widespread interest among staff in higher education to better understand this practice of 'English' name adoption among students. Furthermore, it enabled valuable feedback to be gathered regarding possible directions for further research on this issue.

Intercultural competence: "uncringe the cringeworthy"

Andrea Dalton

Communication skills, cultural knowledge, and personal attributes such as cultural sensitivity and open-mindedness towards others – the very core of intercultural competence – are more important than ever in a globalised contemporary world. Nevertheless, the lack of tolerance in the general population towards native speaker pronunciation poses an interesting phenomenon. The BBC, said to be one of the largest broadcasting organisation in the world, employs three full-time linguists, dedicated orthoepists (or professional pronouncers) to focus on the correct pronunciation of places and names. Is mutual understanding not more important than prescriptive correctness? What are the reasons behind our oversensitivity when it comes to pronouncing foreign words and what are the implications for language learning?

The purpose of this talk is to introduce future research plans. In particular I would like to investigate what forces are at play when we cringe at someone pronounce a foreign word in a native like fashion and the linguistic behaviour which comes into existence during hyperforeignism. Speech action conversion technology and software (as developed by Nishida, 2014) may work towards filling that cultural gap in allowing the NNS to feel less self-conscious speaking with a shared accent. This has implications for language learning and teaching as well as intercultural awareness.

The most important interaction I have had since coming to Sussex

Rachel Cole and Yolanda Cerda

Having analysed texts written by eleven students in response to the question: 'What is the most important interaction you have had since coming to Sussex?', we have selected three narratives which reflect the three different types of approach generally adopted by the students in their attempts to achieve ICC: maintenance; replacement and negotiation. We use this framework and related literature to explore these students' cultural journeys and how ICC relates to academic cultural adjustment in HE, before, finally, asking what some of the practical implications may be.

Assessing cultural awareness

Jeremy Page

In this brief presentation I outlined an initiative to assess, primarily for diagnostic purposes, the intercultural awareness of incoming students on a General English course. The assessment took the form of a brief interview task which required the students firstly to reflect on their own cultural norms and expectations, and secondly to consider how they might best achieve a range of communicative purposes in English:

Cultural Awareness Task

Are these statements true for people in your country? And for people in the UK?

1. We call most people by their first names.
2. We shake hands when we meet people for the first time.
3. When friends meet or say goodbye they kiss on both cheeks.
4. When you arrange to meet friends you should always arrive on time.
5. Young people always give up their seat for older people on public transport.

What could you say in these situations in the UK?

6. You want to know if a seat is free on a train.
7. Someone you have just met invites you out to dinner but you don't want to go.
8. You need directions to the school office.
9. At a welcome party you are offered a glass of wine, but you don't drink alcohol.
10. You have forgotten to go to the bank and need to borrow £5 from a close friend.

The task proved useful both as a tool for assessing oral fluency and as a way of highlighting the intercultural dimension of language use and its significance on the course they would be following. Outcomes of the task were made available to class tutors, who were able to take account of the insights provided into their students' cultural awareness. In the case of the class referred to in James Greenough's piece, the task was formally revisited later in the term.

Details of future *Research on ELT and Language and Culture* talks available on the SCLS website:

Sussex Centre for Language Studies: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/languages/>

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