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**Interculturalidade na Aprendizagem de Línguas na
Universidade.**

**The Thrill of Discovery: Developing Intercultural
Communication in the Foreign Language Classroom
at University.**





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palavras-chave

competências em comunicação intercultural, consciência crítica, pedagogia crítica, interdisciplinaridade, aprendizagem ao longo da vida.

resumo

Em face de galopante globalização da nossa sociedade, tanto a nível político como económico e cultural, o modo como as diferentes línguas são ensinadas na universidade deve, também, preparar os estudantes para participarem na cidadania, com uma postura crítica. Este estudo debruça-se sobre a comunicação intercultural, o plurilinguismo, a aprendizagem ao longo da vida e a mobilidade na Europa.

Através de questionários sobre aspectos culturais e aprendizagem de línguas, relatórios biográficos e entrevistas, procuram-se novos rumos para o ensino das línguas, em contexto universitário, de modo a que os estudantes possam ser comprometidos com a 'Europa do conhecimento' quer como profissionais quer como cidadãos democratas.

keywords

intercultural communicative competence, critical cultural awareness, critical pedagogy, interdisciplinary, lifelong learning

abstract

In view of the increasing political, economic and cultural globalisation of our society, the way foreign languages are taught at university needs to prepare students to participate in this society and think critically. This study explores the issues of intercultural communication, plurilingualism, lifelong learning and mobility in Europe. By means of questionnaires on culture and language learning, student biographies and focused interviews, it is hoped to find some new directions in language education at university, so that students can engage in the 'Europe of knowledge' both as professionals and democratic citizens.

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Preface

Having an English father and a German mother has given me the ‘privilege’ of growing up with and within two languages and two cultures. I have lived extensively in England and Germany, and since leaving university, I have travelled and lived in many other European countries and cultures before coming to settle in Portugal. In an article where she discusses the *‘dynamics of the intercultural experience’* Amita Sen Gupta (2002) says that being bicultural can be seen as a blessing or a curse. Certainly, when I was a child growing up in urban Manchester, I would have adhered to the latter view that being different and speaking another language, reading other stories and eating different foods seemed more like a curse. As children, we want to belong to a group – to be part of *the mainstream*. We want to fit in. I recall being bullied at school because of my German roots and feeling humiliated at having to stand on a chair in front of the class at Christmas and sing German Christmas carols. However, as I got older, I began to realise that being bicultural and having the power to switch between different languages and identities made me feel special and privileged. Every year I would go to Germany with my family and live in a different world and meet lots of people with another way of being to the one I was used to in England and I *loved* it.

Being bicultural is a definitely a blessing and it has given me what Michael Byram calls the *‘bilingual vision’* which has enabled me to acquire *‘a greater depth of vision of the world’* and *‘another dimension of experience, which seeing through two languages seems to create.’* (Byram & Grundy, 2002:52). Being bicultural has certainly opened up an almost insatiable curiosity to travel, learn languages and to discover other cultures. It has also helped me to learn other foreign languages with relative ease because I learn by listening and observing and I am not worried about making mistakes and taking risks, as this was all part of learning two languages at home. I am motivated because I want to belong and to understand why things are different. I do not just want to learn the meaning of the word, but the context and connotations of the word. I want to know what the words mean to the people who use them. Another dimension is that I feel what I can only describe as a kind of *‘cultural neutrality’* which gives me a great sense of freedom and the sensation that my culture is not what many have described as *‘baggage’* or some kind of label or flag that I wave, but rather knowledge and awareness of different things

and other ways of seeing the world, which I can choose to enjoy or ignore, which I can take with me or leave behind. I never feel that I am losing culture or identities but rather that I am continually adding to them. I can pick and choose, adapt and be flexible, join in or observe, stay or walk away.

Thirty years ago, I was the only student in my class of thirty to have a parent of a different nationality. Nowadays, it is becoming more commonplace to have children who are multicultural and multilingual in our classes. My personal aim in this project is to try to take the anxiety out of this situation of how to 'deal with' so much diversity in the classroom and to illustrate that it is a very positive and fulfilling experience for teachers and students alike. We all learn with and from one another. Particularly at tertiary level, it is not an 'us' (the teachers) and 'them' (the students) situation. We are all part of the learning process. We engage with one another and while our journey of learning follows the curricular structure of a programme, it always takes different turns and has very varied outcomes, depending each year on the group of people involved and what every individual brings to the classroom.

Setting up a positive and more holistic learning environment of sharing and comparing ideas and building upon what each person brings into the classroom in terms of their experiences and awareness, as well as their knowledge, is the starting point for acquiring intercultural awareness and competence and the capacity to see 'otherness' as a new dimension and not a cul-de-sac. In many ways, the classroom is a microcosm of society. For most students, university is the final rung of the formal education ladder, before they go out into 'the big wide world' and fend for themselves. It is therefore important that we use our language classrooms as resources and real-life communities for intercultural communication and exchange. In this way we are not only preparing students to feel integrated as global citizens of the world, we are also initiating the curiosity and interest in learning about other peoples and cultures which aren't 'out there somewhere', but 'right here' in our classrooms.

Therefore, when students leave university, it shouldn't be an ending but an ongoing process of lifelong learning about themselves, about others and about the world we all

live in and share. I do not think that the will to go on learning is something that happens automatically for most people. It is a curiosity and interest in learning and knowledge that has to be fostered and developed at university to prepare students to become not just local, but international citizens participating fully in society and being aware of difference as something to be embraced rather than shunned. It is what I like to call the ‘*thrill of discovery*’ and it is this motivation to learn, to unravel and to find something new that is the basis of communicating with others and is the *blessing* of intercultural communicative competence:

*‘The ability to communicate in a foreign language is not merely potentially **useful**, but also a **unique dimension** of a child’s development.’ (my emphasis)*

(Byram & Grundy,2002:14)

The Thrill of Discovery: Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Foreign Language Classroom at University.

1 Introduction

In recent documents on the future of language education in Europe, the Council of Europe advocates plurilingual and pluricultural competence as a means of meeting the demands of our increasingly diverse and multicultural society (Council of Europe, 1996b). The acquisition of one or more foreign languages is considered a ‘powerful element of intercultural education’ (Starkey, 2002:103). In recent years, theories of language learning have increasingly emphasised the need for ‘communicative competence’. The mastery of a foreign language is not simply a question of learning grammar and lexis, it also involves sociolinguistic and pragmatic components (van Ek, 1986). Current research on communication theory, moreover, reveals that the success of communication between people from different cultural backgrounds is not so much a question of linguistic competence, but much more a question of the ‘intercultural communicative competences’ (Byram & Zarate, 1997) of the interlocutors involved.

In view of these developments and the rapidly increasing political, economic and cultural globalisation of the society we live in, the way we teach foreign languages is in need of re-assessment and re-evaluation. Rather than teaching a ‘defined body of knowledge which teachers teach and learners learn’, learners need to be given the opportunity of ‘acquiring knowledge and understanding independently’ (Byram, 1997a). This is particularly true at tertiary level where students are being trained not only to become professionals in their own fields and countries, but also critical and participating citizens of an increasingly intercultural world. Our post-industrial and service-based economy has led to quite staggering developments in telecommunications, so that we are in touch with an international community of people at the click of a button and we are also required to be more mobile than ever before, as we pursue education and work opportunities in other countries, among other cultures and realities than those we are used to. The marketplace is an international forum, which

has opened up new opportunities and challenges. At the same time, it has also created more competition and friction as different cultures, ideas and ideologies collide and vie for space, power, validity and understanding. Global citizenship and awareness is the recognition and understanding of these interrelationships among international organisations, nation states, public and private entities, socio-cultural groups and, most importantly of all, individuals across the globe. A recent article in *The Economist* has described this global restructuring of society ‘as historically significant as any event since the Industrial Revolution and it is happening at tremendous speed’ (www.economist.com / 21.12.2000)

Languages are not just skills and competences. Languages belong to cultures and peoples. They have histories and stories which unravel and take on new colours as they are passed down through different generations. They are not static, but always changing, adapting and crossing borders. Being able to speak a foreign language and communicate with others is a *fundamental* part of what it means to be a human being:

Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world about him. How he manages his survival, how he develops intimacy, how productive he is and how he makes sense of the world are largely dependent on his communication skills.

(Virginia Satir, 1992:4)

How can foreign language educators at university equip students with the knowledge, skills and behaviours they are going to need, so that they can participate fully in our plurilingual and pluricultural societies? How can we teach our students to be ‘intercultural beings’ or what Phipps & Gonzalez (2004) call ‘language people’? How can we prepare students for the marketplace and for the diverse intercultural living space of their futures? In a time of crisis and cuts in tertiary education and in modern language teaching particularly, how can we develop new concepts and create new courses that do not involve just *adding* a language to another degree subject, thus devaluing this holistic view of intercultural awareness and competence? Teaching and

learning about foreign languages and cultures integrates much broader educational frameworks, so rather than focusing on the uses and outcomes of grammatical proficiency, we need to address the bigger picture, namely human rights education and education for democratic citizenship. We need to work with issues of identity, difference and equality to prepare our students to engage in the social and political worlds they live in. We need to foster students' interests and help them to become 'critical citizens' and to develop 'critical cultural awareness' (Guilherme, 2002). Teachers of foreign languages and cultures will need to prepare students to be both intercultural speakers (Byram & Morgan, 1994) and democratic citizens. This is the challenge at the heart of foreign language education in this new millennium and the focal point of this research project:

It is plain that if teachers do not acquire and display this capacity to redefine their skills for the task of teaching, and if they do not model in their own conduct the very qualities – flexibility, networking, creativity – that are now key outcomes for students, then the challenge of schooling in the next millennium will not be met.

(Hargreaves, 1999:123)

1.1 Meeting the Challenge: The Role of Universities in a Europe of Knowledge.

Given their central role in the growth and development of a Europe of knowledge, universities are both a source of opportunities and of major challenges. Universities are no longer national institutions but intercultural communities which are constantly changing, developing and collaborating on an international scale. According to a recent European Commission document discussing the role of universities in the 'Europe of knowledge', the university plays a *vital* role in 'producing' knowledge through education and training, 'disseminating knowledge' through information and communication technologies and 'applying' knowledge in an 'increasingly internationalised network-driven context' (CEC, 2003b). There are now around 4000 universities in Europe and student intake is rising every year – now over 13 million students compared with fewer than 9 million ten years ago. Given these statistics and the fact that a third of Europeans nowadays work in highly knowledge-intensive sectors,

it is clear that universities contribute significantly to the future growth and improvement of a 'Europe of knowledge' and to the social cohesion and effectiveness of a European community. Where students at school learn the foundations of knowledge and are guided through various fields of knowledge, university students choose their specialised fields and are far more independent and responsible for their own learning outcomes. The role of the university should therefore be to foster these interests and capacities, to encourage their development and to open up ways for students to think, to explore, to learn independently, to question issues and to investigate, to discover and to move 'beyond' the classroom both in their personal and professional growth. The emphasis given in European documents on the 'process' of learning and the motivation to go on learning and contributing to society beyond their courses - lifelong learning - suggests that universities have to look far beyond exam grades and subject-specific-evaluation to programmes of education which prepare students to become 'critical citizens for an intercultural world' as outlined by Guilherme (2002), in her book of the same name.

The Council of Europe's *Declaration and Programme on Education for Democratic Citizenship Based on the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens* adopted by the Committee of Ministers in May 1999, reinforces, among other objectives, that this programme sets out to 'prepare people to live in a multicultural society and deal with difference knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and morally' (Council of Europe, 1999). Hence, the Council of Europe clearly recognises the need for the citizens of Europe to learn about one another, to study foreign languages, to respect and be aware of other cultures, to value and preserve their own cultures and to communicate across social, physical and cultural borders and differences. Foreign language education at university should therefore 'enable' students/citizens 'to learn to use languages for the purposes of mutual understanding, personal mobility and access to information in a multilingual and multicultural Europe' (CEC, 1996b:8). The two key words pertinent to this study seem to be 'enable' and 'access', suggesting that the role of foreign language teachers at university should aim to facilitate this learning process by providing access to *both* language and culture. Students should be exposed to different ways thinking and living so that they can explore and discover other cultures, and compare their lifestyles with those of other peoples. They should be encouraged to ask questions and find their own

answers. Language students at university should learn how to be what Byram & Morgan (1994) call ‘mediators’ between cultures. They are not purely language students within a language department but individuals with skills, awareness and knowledge which can be applied across a whole range of disciplines and workplaces.

In the current climate within Portugal of high unemployment facing foreign language graduates and teachers, it is time to redress the balance. Being able to speak foreign languages fluently and being sensitive to other cultures so that you can communicate successfully with other people is at the very *heart* of belonging and living within a European and indeed an international community. Exchanging information, knowledge and goods, as well as sharing ideas and values cannot happen if we are unable to communicate with one another. Business cannot flourish without people who speak languages, just as education without an integrated programme of language-and-culture learning and appreciation would be unthinkable. It would be a dull, grey book without any colours, without any *vida*. Languages are not commodities for business or specific purposes. They are part of the fabric of life, progress and development which all depend on our capacities to communicate and understand one another.

Learning foreign languages at university should therefore be focused upon ‘the development of individual resources and skills and the multiple investigation of possibilities and problem-solving capacities’ (Pennycook, 1994). Students themselves embody the change and need to be ‘guided, stimulated and given the conditions to blossom and flourish’ (Guilherme, 2002:3). While the students are the ‘resource’ of the university and future society, the teacher has to be *resourceful*, creative, positive and encouraging in this process. Fullan sums up this key role when he says that ‘educational change depends on what teachers *do* and *think* – it is as simple and as complex as that’ (Fullan, 1991:117). Therefore, higher education has a great responsibility in the process of educational change and progress and indeed in the future of our societies.

1.2 An Intercultural Approach to Language Learning and Teaching

It should be part of the purposes of education to promote a sense of interculturality, an intercultural competence, all the more significant now in our contemporary world. Our concept of intercultural understanding depends on our concept of language.

(Bredella, 2002:231)

Having given a brief overview of the global and institutional context for this study in our contemporary world, I would like to introduce the concept of an intercultural approach to language learning and teaching which is a central strand in this study. The argument that cultural studies is an integral part of language teaching because of the relationship between language and culture is not a new one. There has been much discussion in recent years about which disciplines should be included in the study of foreign languages in higher education – history, anthropology, sociology, politics, and economics, among others (Kerl, 1993; Barnett, 2000; Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004). Nevertheless, the conclusions of these studies are varied, open-ended and multidirectional because language learning *is* a complex issue and the societies we are preparing our students for are ‘supercomplex’ (Barnett, 2000). The history of language teaching has tended to focus much more on the role of the methodology rather than the cultures that students bring into and take out of the language classroom. Byram says that it is essentially through the cultural studies in foreign language education that language teachers are gaining ‘an increasing understanding of the *nature* of language and the attempts to incorporate *new discoveries* into methods and objectives’ (Byram, 1997b).

What makes the study of foreign languages so fascinating is that they are as complex, diverse and intricate as the human beings who have developed them. Languages and cultures are in a constant flux. They are not linear but multidirectional and interdisciplinary. ‘Culture is the thousand people sitting in your seat’ (Pederson, 1997). In his fascinating book *Beyond Culture*, which in itself suggests what some have called the ‘fuzziness’ of culture and the lack of clear-cut answers in culture because we are all viewing the picture from different standpoints and perspectives, Edward Hall outlines the two crises which we face in our contemporary world. One is the

‘population/environment crisis – the latter especially pertinent in the aftermath of the Tsunami in South East Asia – and humankind’s ‘relationships’ to its ‘extensions, institutions and ideas’ alongside the ‘relationships among the many individuals and groups that inhabit the globe.’ Hall’s answer to our intercultural /international problems is not to ‘*restrict*’ human endeavours but to ‘*evolve* new possibilities, new dimensions, new options, and new avenues for human beings based on the recognition of the multiple and unusual talents so manifest in the diversity of the human race’ (Hall, 1976:5). Both Byram and Hall emphasize the hope and potential within human beings and the impetus to keep on looking for *new* ways and means of communicating with one another. This is what I have come to call the ‘thrill of discovery’, which is at the heart of communicating with other people in a foreign language.

When we learn another language, especially at university level, our objectives as language teachers and learners cannot be just to learn/teach the linguistic and grammatical structures of a language. This would be to reduce languages to mathematical formulas and make them dull, meaningless and indeed rather pointless. When we communicate in another language we need to know how to empathise with our interlocutors, to be sensitive and knowledgeable about difference, to be able to negotiate, mediate and really exchange meaningful information. Both Byram & Morgan (1994) and Phipps & Gonzalez (2004) talk about *engaging* with the other person so that we are on a par with them. We are communicating with one another and not as ‘one’ with ‘another’. In effect, what we are doing in an idiomatic sense is ‘speaking the same language.’ It is what Halliday (1997) and Phipps & Gonzalez (2004) refer to as ‘*languaging*’, which is engaging in a foreign language with all your senses, not just in terms of grammatical correctness. I use the term *foreign* language because it might not even be the mother tongue of either of the people who are communicating. It might even be a whole melange of languages. Real *languaging* is just that. It is the way we communicate in our multilingual and multicultural worlds. We slip into different identities and other languages to try to find the right words and reach shared contexts to get our message across.

The idea of languaging in this sense goes hand-in-hand with what Byram refers to as an *intercultural being* or *intercultural communicator*: someone who can slip into someone else's shoes and empathize with otherness, while at the same time engaging in reflection about their own culture and way of living. The problem with skimming over culture or making it a secondary part of foreign language learning is that we run the risk of trivialising others' values and cultures, rather than enriching the language learner and the outcome of learning another language. Such knowledge may end up 'being no more than intellectual tourism, or high-grade stereotyping' (Brumfit, 1980). Leach (1982) also underlines how 'superficial contrasts' can create resistance and prejudice, unless learners understand that these contrasts are *just* 'superficial'. Contrasting cultures is a crucial part of the language-learning process because by drawing comparisons, students learn to be sensitive to the concept of 'otherness' and the 'problem of how we are all the same and how far we are different' (Byram & Morgan, 1994:57). Hence learning and teaching about another culture implies taking a critical look at one's own culture. The concept of Intercultural Communication (IC) is then a combination of both a linguistic and cultural knowledge of a foreign language/culture in the form of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) (Byram, 1997b).

Manuela Guilherme concludes that despite the recent interest in the intercultural component of foreign language teaching, intercultural training in general 'has often been *invisible* in foreign language/culture classes *at all levels* and also in teacher development programmes' (Guilherme, 2002:214, my italics). I would share this view from my experience both as a language learner and teacher in Europe. Therefore, one of my principle aims in this study is to look into this issue of Intercultural Communication (IC) and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) through the voices and opinions of my own language students. How do they see the cultural component of language learning? What role does culture play in learning a foreign language? Do students feel that they are acquiring and developing ICC in their language classrooms?

1.3 The Critical Dimension in Foreign Language Learning.

In the context of the modern languages curriculum, it is not always clear what ‘culture’ is and also what learning about culture(s) actually means or involves. Phipps & Gonzalez (2004) aptly identify it as a ‘discipline under siege’ and talk about ‘culture wars’, as culture has become a discipline that is often misunderstood as belonging to capital ‘C’ culture or some kind of ‘refined’ culture restricted to upper classes and pertaining to individual status and pursuits rather than global and democratic ones:

Until comparatively recently, indeed probably until the immediate post-war period, modern languages were seldom learnt as a means to communicate – to transact business, or to interact with others. Learning languages was seen instead as an individual pursuit, a mark of refined culture, the ultimate expression of a disciplined intellect.

(Grenfell, 2000:2)

The ability to speak other languages with some degree of fluency is a skill which has always been valued largely by the middle classes as an asset to one’s education or to use the more embracing German term, part of one’s *Bildung*. Foreign languages were seen as an ‘accomplishment’ like drawing or music, especially among upper middle class women: ... *accomplished ... a woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing and modern languages, to deserve the word.* (Austen, 1813:85)

The Grand Tour was another reason for the bourgeoisie to learn languages. Languages were in the realm of the elite and they brought the potential for status, wealth, travel and leisure. Bourdieu (1994) refers to this potential as ‘cultural capital’. Culture was something which was inherited and which endowed people with wealth, social status and potential. In the early twentieth century, foreign languages were part of a prestigious world of employment when those with material and ‘cultural capital’ like the civil service and diplomatic services were the people who travelled and needed to

possess a very defined and certainly rather restricted cultural knowledge to engage with others in similar functions and holding equivalent social and political positions. Given this historical elitism of 'Culture' and the fact that academic life is often seen to be rather hallowed in the sense that it is set apart from 'real' social and practical life, fundamental questions have to be raised about what teaching culture really means:

Culture is now understood in a more complex manner as material practice and social interaction, in other words as a verb or an adjective, as process and description rather than a noun which reifies.

(Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004:45)

This concept of culture as dynamic, social, unpredictable and 'complex' is what I understand to be at the heart of critical cultural awareness in the language classroom today. It is making our students aware of and sensitive to the rich diversity and difference that exists in our increasingly multicultural and multilingual worlds. It is what Eagleton (2000) calls 'an appropriation of the world as it is' and what Cronin (2000) says should be seeing difference not as 'the pathology of closure' but as 'deepening a sense of our shared humanity. Cronin goes on to say that 'critical universalism' should be embracing others' differences through 'sharing a common condition' and not through 'the eradication' of the other.

We all bring culture into the classroom, so culture is both 'dense with accumulated experience' but at the same time, it is alive and 'humming with life'. (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004:51). I particularly like this idiom of culture being 'alive and humming with life' because it places culture in the what Barnett (2000) calls 'supercomplex' here and now of modern life and pinpoints the fact that culture is constantly changing and developing and we are a part of it, we interact with it and create different realities. We are not just passive onlookers or observers of culture at arm's length. It is hard to keep up with it and in order to help our students to notice, think, feel and smell and taste cultures in a critical and constructive way, teachers need to have vision and be creative. However, Phipps and Gonzalez go on to say that despite all the shifts and acknowledgements of the 'potential' of cultural studies, 'so-called' culture courses

continue to focus on institutions, political figures, stereotypes and intellectual life, using the same formats of analysing texts and writing a ‘cultural commentary’ on them so that ‘the material life of culture is reduced to a slightly expanded notion of text’:

This is the ‘philologism’ which ... tends to treat all languages like dead languages, fit only for deciphering ...rather than as instrument of action or power.

(Bourdieu, 2000:53)

Hence the third strand of this study sets out to expand these rather limited notions of ‘high’ culture to include a much wider kaleidoscope of what learning about social and cultural life might really mean. How can we develop skills of intuition and inquisitiveness in our students? In what ways can this critical dimension of culture which is outlined in the ‘Common European Frame of Reference’ (2001) be incorporated into foreign language classes at university? How might we help our students to avert their attention from language outcomes and marks to the cultural processes of feeling, and *living* another culture – to see language learning as a journey rather than just a destination? It is moving from the individual perspective to an understanding that we are all part of groups and we belong to a human race which inhabits an international world. We see the world in different ways and live different social, political and cultural realities, speak different languages and so there will always be lots of questions and differences in the air. Yet this is the framework for learning a foreign language and culture that we should be adopting rather than regarding cultural differences as barrier to be avoided:

*Culture is that territory or **dimension of experience in which meaning emerges**; more precisely, that experience of meaning in which the **individual is creatively related to the collective**.*

(Brink, 1983:224, my emphasis)

If critical awareness is to be achieved through foreign language education, it will not occur automatically through inputting information and training language skills and competences. According to Barnett’s study of critical reflection in higher education,

reflection is a 'metacritique' and involves a 'critical stance' towards one's own knowledge, oneself, one's social context(s) as well as 'external reflection' which is 'the capacity to become an *other* to inhabit if only briefly, a cognitive perspective that is unfamiliar' (Barnett, 1997:19). Both these processes lead to what Barnett calls 'critical action'.

1.4 Research Objectives and Project Outline

The research questions at the basis of this thesis are as follows:

1. What is intercultural communication and intercultural communicative competence and how might university students acquire this competence?
2. To what extent are language students at university aware of and/or interested in the cultural dimension of language learning?
3. How do language students at university perceive their own culture and relate this knowledge to other cultures in their language learning?
4. To what extent are university language students being prepared to be critical citizens of Europe?
5. What are the gaps in language students' intercultural communicative competence and how might these gaps be filled by universities the future?

The project is divided into four parts. Following an introduction into the field of learning a foreign language/culture and the role of the university in this process, part one will address the question of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and the field of intercultural communication. Various models for intercultural communicative competence will be presented and discussed as well as the concepts of the intercultural speaker, cultural identity and language-and-culture learning. I will then go on to extend the discussion into the issue of learning foreign languages within the *'European Framework of Reference for Language Teaching, Learning and Assessment (2001)'*. Within this framework I will examine the practical implications for foreign language teaching and learning at university, as well as the converging areas of critical

citizenship, human rights and critical pedagogy. I will also address the issue of 'lifelong learning' and the role of universities in preparing students for this.

In part two of the study, I will outline the context and rationale of the research and the questions which provided the framework for this project. I will also discuss the methodology and procedures used in collating and analysing data.

In part three the focus is on the students' voices. Having presented the theoretical framework for intercultural communication and language-and-culture learning for European citizenship, I will be asking the students for their views. This research will begin by investigating profiles of the students I teach at the University of Aveiro, Portugal and their reasons and motivations for choosing to study languages. The students in question are fourth year students who are approaching the end of their courses of English/German and Portuguese/English. They will begin their teacher training in the autumn of 2005. The students will also complete questionnaires about their language-and-culture learning at the university, their Erasmus experiences and finally, they will take part in focus group interviews.

Part four will then reflect on the students' voices and on the theories of intercultural communication and critical citizenship in the foreign language classroom, to consider the role of the university in fulfilling these criteria. How has the university already reacted to these developments in language education? Are students being prepared to participate as critical citizens within the European Union and the international, global society we live in? What is the role of language-and-culture learning within university education? What is the future of the Humanities in the university community and in forging global unity? What is the relationship between languages and the marketplace? How might intercultural communicative competences be recognised and evaluated alongside the more traditional evaluation systems?

The final part of the study, reluctantly called 'conclusions', will provide a summary of the conclusions that might be drawn from this study to suggest some future directions for foreign language-and-culture education at university.

The data discussed in the body of the thesis is contained in four appendices at the end. Appendix 1 contains the questionnaire used to compile the student biographies, (pp. 169-74). Appendix 2 focuses on students' attitudes towards the concept of language-and-culture learning, (pp.175). Appendix 3 explores the students' feelings and opinions about their Erasmus experiences in England and Germany, (pp.176/179). And finally, Appendix 4 will give an outline of the interview used with the focus-groups, (pp.180).

2 Foreign Language and Culture Education

2.1 Moving From Language *and* Culture to Language-and-Culture.

The history of language teaching is the history of increasing understanding of the nature of language and the attempts to incorporate new discoveries into methods and objectives.

(Byram, 1997b:12)

The reasons and motivations for learning a foreign language are probably as diverse as the number and nature of the languages available to learn. Modern languages are now taught in primary, secondary and tertiary education; business people need to learn languages to function effectively in the global marketplace and travellers learn languages as they go further and further a-field and need a ‘sprinkling’ of languages to ‘get by’ along the way. Whatever the motivations and outcomes of language learning and however long or short the language courses followed might be, it is true to say that foreign language teaching and learning has ‘otherness’ at the heart of its concern. It requires learners to *engage* with both familiar and unfamiliar experiences and ways of seeing and living in the world through the medium of another language. On another level, it also aims to *enable* learners to *interact* with people for whom it is their ‘natural’ medium of experience, ie: native speakers. Passing on the impression to language learners that language and culture can be separated, or that linguistic skills are more important or relevant to enable students to engage and interact with people from other cultures is narrow, deceptive and incomplete. Deluding people who are learning languages to think that it is simply a case of jumping through linguistic hoops and interacting with computers or repeating disjointed phrases from CDs and trying to ‘imitate’ the way native speakers speak the language, is not just misleading but truly disheartening:

This idealised monolingual native speaker/hearer representative of one monolingual discourse community, might still exist in people’s imaginations, but has never corresponded to reality. Most people in the world belong to more than one discourse community. They know and use more than one language: the language of the home and

the language of the school, the language of work and the language of the foreign spouse, the language of the immigrant colleague and that of the foreign business partner.

(Kramsch, 1993:27)

Language is embedded in such culturally diverse communities that it is impossible to ignore culture or regard culture as a kind of backdrop for language learning. A thorough understanding of a language can only be achieved through an understanding of the cultural contexts that have produced it. Ignoring the cultural aspect of communicating in a foreign language is ‘a nuisance at best and often a disaster’ according to Hofstede (www.geert-hofstede.com/1-3). Brown emphasises the need to be aware of the cultural dimension of language learning so that differences do not become barriers but rather learning curves which need to be an *integral* part of communicating appropriately in a foreign language:

... differences are real and we must learn to deal with them in any situation in which two cultures come into contact.

(Brown, 1987:136)

Culture is not just a simple case of shared knowledge and beliefs but rather what Garfinkel more appropriately calls ‘shared rules and interpretations’, (Garfinkel, 1972:304). Over a lifetime, we acquire a whole range of rules of interpretation and these are not limited to one social group. We have to learn to be flexible and adaptable to a whole plethora of social situations and contexts in order to communicate effectively and appropriately. Therefore this reality needs to place culture at the core of communicative language teaching. The teaching profession now has ‘an implicit commandment that “thou shalt not” teach language without also teaching culture’ (Higgs, 1990:74).

No term encapsulates the above testimony more than Byram and Morgan’s joining of language and culture as ‘language-and-culture’ in their seminal book *Teaching-and-Learning Language-and Culture* (1994), where they write in the introduction:

The hyphenation of 'language-and-culture' in our title is at once an indication of the recent surge of interest in the cultural learning dimension in language learning, and a reminder that this interest should not lead to a separation, either in theoretical discussion or classroom practice, of cultural studies from language learning. In this respect our earlier title, 'Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education', Byram & Morgan (1989), had a carefully chosen preposition, and a seminal work by Melde (1987), 'Zur Integration von Landeskunde und Kommunikation im Fremdsprachenunterricht', rightly emphasises the particular need in Germany to combine theories of learning about other countries with theories of communication.

(Byram & Morgan, 1994:1)

According to Bryam & Morgan, in chapter one of this book, the fusion of culture and foreign language learning is by no means as widespread or accredited as it should be either in the theory or practice of teaching and learning a foreign language. In many cases, culture is not valued in its own right is seen rather an 'add-on' to language courses to make them more marketable and viable (Phipps & Gonzalez:2004). Languages are therefore perceived as 'skills and competences' and any notion of modern languages as an 'intellectual discipline full of *possibilities*, a source of *understanding* and *insights* that can *empower* and *enrich* human life' (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004:2) is not really an issue on the top of many language curricula. More often than not though, learners 'acquire some information' about the culture of the language they are learning, but rarely gain any real 'knowledge' of the foreign culture in their language classes. (Byram & Morgan 1994:3). The problem of learning a selected body of information about the target culture is that it doesn't really require the learner to engage in what it is like to be a member of that culture. It is just 'information', rather than 'knowledge' which unfortunately often serves to reinforce stereotypes of the target culture and, in the case of English, it tends to reduce a language which is used by millions to communicate in a million other contexts than 'English' ones, to fixed ideas of *one* 'British English' entrenched firmly in notions such as 'cream teas', 'the Royal family', 'conservative values' and 'football hooliganism'. If language learners are not given *opportunities* to explore cultural realities for themselves and if they are not encouraged to *think* about culture and compare it with their own ideas and worlds

through ‘self-reflection’ (Byram & Morgan, 1994), then culture becomes abstract, static and it imposes one culture (usually a dominant one) upon the student:

The stereotyped Other is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation.

(Bhabha, 1994:75)

We only gain knowledge through experience and learning. That is what makes knowledge meaningful and transferable from one context to another. Culture is a socially constructed and dynamic system of meaning which manifests itself in language. Students need to become linguistically aware of other cultures. Knapp & Knapp-Pothoff (1990) outline the importance of meta-language and non-verbal communication such as facial expression and body language as well as paraverbal communication (pitch, intonation and pausing) and communicative style (direct and explicit versus indirect). Communication clearly takes place in a wide diversity of contexts and on different levels and so this is culture, too. It is not enough to ‘appreciate’ another culture as a support to linguistic proficiency.

According to Byram (1988), there are three key works in the development of language-and-culture teaching/learning, (Brown, 1987; Pfister & Poser, 1987; Seelye, 1996). Rather than seeing culture as ‘background information’, all three works underline the central role of the language teacher, not as some kind of ‘model’ of linguistic perfection but as a human being whose aim is to try and ‘build a bridge’ from the cognitive system of the students to the culture of the target language. We can only understand how other people think, behave and live through culture and the language teacher works as a ‘facilitator’ in this process of discovering and learning about otherness:

*One cannot understand a native speaker, if his cultural referents, his view of the world, and his linguistic forms are **novel**. The language teacher can build bridges from one cognitive system to another.*

(Seelye, 1996:22)

The cultural content therefore creates the motivation to learn and opens the way for the language learner to *discover* what it is like to use another language in social realities which are sometimes different but quite often the *same* as our own. These similarities are often blurred or made problematic by the distances created by the generic terms of the language classroom used to describe the other language/culture as ‘foreign’, ‘strange’, ‘Ausländer’, ‘fremd’, ‘estrangeiro’ and ‘outsider’. Learning about culture is to learn about others and to relate these experiences and feelings to our own. Learning *about culture* is also learning *about language*: when it is used, how it is used, by whom for what reasons and in what circumstances. Buttjes conceptualises these ideas very well when he says that culture is not only valid in its own right, but should come before language as a *priority*. Apart from being motivating in itself as part of the language learning process, culture also ‘indirectly promotes inter-lingual competence.’ (Buttjes, 1988:8).

It is not only interlanguage but rather cultural exploration that gives language students a unique opportunity to experience otherness and enrich their own culture and indeed their own lives. ‘To enter other cultures is to re-enter one’s own.’ (Barnett, 2000). Even more than this, perhaps, is that students gain a deeper understanding of what Barnett famously calls the ‘supercomplex’ variety of human experience and this not only broadens but it also *deepens* human experience and becomes what Phipps & Gonzalez (2004) call ‘*intercultural being*’ (their italics) ... but they would also be mine.

Table 1 represents a dynamic model of language-and-culture learning or what Phipps calls ‘*linguaging*’ as opposed to just learning a language. (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004:3). It is a valuable representation of the shifts between more traditional views of language learning and evaluation to what I suggest we should be aiming at in language-and-culture teaching at university. It is to put the *human* back into the *humanities* and to reassert language-and-culture learning as the basis of lifelong learning and developing Intercultural Communicative Competence which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Table 1 represents the shifts between the conceptual frameworks that focus on language learning as opposed to language-and-culture learning or *linguaging* (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004:3).

Table 1

Languaging and language learning

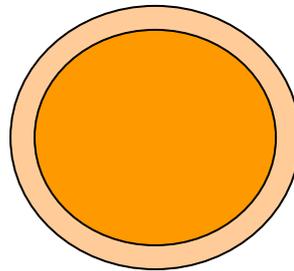
	Language learning	<i>Languaging</i>
Purpose	Pragmatic skill	<i>Ontological skill</i>
Context	Classroom focus	<i>Whole social world</i>
Outcome	Assessed performance	<i>Feel and fluency</i>
Aim	Accuracy and measurable knowledge	<i>Meaning-making and human connection</i>
Disposition	Competition	<i>Open, collective exploration and exchange</i>
Agency	Intercultural communicative competence	<i>Intercultural being criticality</i>
Creativity	Prescribed by form	<i>Freed through form</i>
Cultures	Learning about	<i>Living in and with</i>
Position	Language at a distance	<i>Language from within</i>
Environment	Objectivity of languages	<i>Material life of languages</i>
Task	Complex	<i>Supercomplex</i>

(Phipps, & Gonzalez, 2004:3. Adapted from Barnett, 1994:179)

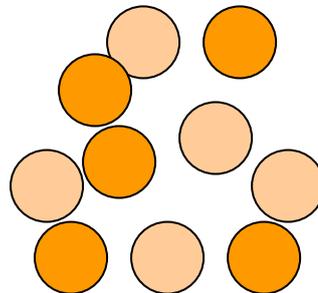
Figure 1 represents the shift from teaching language and culture to teaching language-and-culture. Culture moves from being just in the background of language teaching/learning to being an *integral* part of language teaching/learning. Rather than being separate processes, culture and language converge and learning becomes active, dynamic and more autonomous.

Figure 1 From Language and Culture to Language-and-Culture

a) From Language and Culture ...



b) ... to Language-and-Culture



 = language

 = culture

In *fig.1a*, language and culture are taught and studied within a confined space. Language dominates and culture is in the background, taking up much less time in the classroom than linguistic study. In *fig.1b*, language-and-culture share the same time and spaces and are free to move where the students and teacher take them. They are given equal importance in a classroom, which is not enclosed, because study goes beyond the classroom into autonomous study, research and personal development.

2.2 An Intercultural Approach to Foreign Language Teaching

It has often been suggested that being intercultural might mean to be curious about other cultures and empathetic with people of other groups. An intercultural person would therefore be synonymous with someone who is 'international' or 'cosmopolitan' and someone who would perhaps choose not to belong to one specific group but would reject social identities in search of 'somewhere else' or a broader horizon. It is 'home plus sun' or *plus* another quality of life that an individual might be searching for, as travel writer Paul Theroux (1982) defines it.

In the introduction to his book *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence (1997b)*, Michael Byram draws a telling distinction between what he defines as the 'tourist' and the 'sojourner'. The role of the tourist corresponds to the idea of people who travel somewhere (often en masse) to see another place to relax, get away from routines and find sun or a different lifestyle from those they live every day. While their lives may be 'enriched' by the experience, they will normally not be fundamentally changed by it. Certainly the nature of mass tourism is generally a very homogenous experience where tourists travel and stay in hotels, usually with people from their own countries, so that their contact with people from the country they are visiting is usually quite negligible.

The experience of the 'sojourner', on the other hand, is one of 'comparisons' and reflection upon what is the same or different in another culture. Sojourners might be migrant workers or part of the social elite but the fact that they spend longer amounts of time in another country and have to survive in another culture and sometimes face conflicts and situations which are incompatible to those they know, means they *challenge* the 'unquestioned and unconscious beliefs, behaviours and meanings' of society and bring about change. The sojourner has the 'opportunity to learn and be educated, acquiring the capacity to critique and improve their own and others' conditions' (Byram, 1997b:1).

Before focusing on ‘intercultural communicative competence’ in the story of language-and-culture teaching/learning, I’d like to take a step back to the concept of ‘communicative competence’ in order to illustrate the difference between the two.

The concept of ‘communicative competence’ was introduced into the Anglophone world by Hymes in 1972. Hymes argued that it was not just grammatical competence which was important in language acquisition, but the ability to use language ‘appropriately’ depending on the interlocutors and the context of communication. He therefore emphasised sociolinguistic competence which was a fundamental cornerstone of communicative language teaching theories. However Hymes’s description of first language acquisition and communication was based on native speakers, so that merely transferring the same mindsets to foreign language teaching and learning is ‘misleading’ (Byram & Zarate, 1997). As Hymes was researching first language acquisition theories the ‘native speaker’ was used as a kind of *model* of language acquisition. However this is not pertinent to foreign language learning contexts because it ignores the social identities and cultural competences of the participants in ‘*intercultural*’ interaction.

It was Canale & Swain (1980) in North America and van Ek (1986) in Europe who took up the concepts of Hymes in their research. As part of the Council of Europe team on foreign language learning and education, van Ek developed what he called ‘a framework for comprehensive foreign language learning objectives’ in which he stated that FLT was not just about learning a foreign language *per se*, but that it was an important part of the learners ‘general education’(1986:33). He also emphasised that FLT was not just about ‘communication skills’, but about the personal and social development of the individual. van Ek’s framework included reference to ‘social competence’, ‘the promotion of autonomy’ and the ‘development of social responsibility’. His model of *communicative ability* (1986:35) comprises of six ‘competences’, in addition to the concepts of autonomy and social responsibility already mentioned (see Table 2, page 32).

Table 2 represents van'Ek's model of the six competences of 'communicative ability' adapted from Byram (1997b:10). It is what Byram calls the 'starting point' for the intercultural approach to teaching/learning foreign languages.

Table 2 van Ek's model of the six competences of communicative ability

<p>1) <i>Linguistic competence</i>: the ability to produce and interpret meaningful utterances which are formed in accordance with the rules of the language concerned and bear their conventional meaning ... that meaning which the native speaker would normally attach to an utterance when used in isolation.</p>
<p>2) <i>Sociolinguistic competence</i>: the awareness of ways in which the choice of language forms ...is determined by such conditions as setting, relationship between communication partners, communicative intention etc.</p>
<p>3) <i>Discourse competence</i>: the ability to use appropriate strategies in the construction and interpretation of texts.</p>
<p>4) <i>Strategic competence</i>: when communication is difficult we have to find ways of 'getting our meaning across' ... these are communication strategies, such as rephrasing, asking for clarification.</p>
<p>5) <i>Socio-cultural competence</i>: every foreign language is situated in a sociocultural context and implies the use of a particular reference frame which is partly different from that of the foreign language learner. Sociocultural competence presupposes a certain degree of familiarity with that context.</p>
<p>6) <i>Social competence</i>: involves both the will and the skill to interact with others, involving motivation, attitude, self-confidence, empathy and the ability to handle social situations.</p>

(van Ek's model of six 'communicative competences', adapted from Byram, 1997b:10)

The problem with this model is that while it suggests some useful developments in communication theory such as ‘empathy’ between the interlocutors and the need to develop an awareness of and ‘familiarity’ with other contexts, the focus is still very much on the native speaker. As far as language is concerned, learners have to speak or write ‘in accordance with the rules’ of the language but van Ek does not mention what the nature or contexts of that language might be. Language cannot be isolated from culture or the social groups who use the language. The trouble with focusing on the native speaker is that it sets *impossible* goals for the language learner to somehow ‘imitate’ the proficiency and natural feeling for the mother tongue that the native speaker has. It therefore de-motivates the learner and leads to inevitable failure and perhaps even alienation from the language. The fact that some teachers insist on imitating native speakers in the foreign language classroom is not just counterproductive and demotivating for students, it is an impossible goal to achieve. ‘Only very few students are able to achieve a level of proficiency that *approximates* the native or native-like level’ (van Els, 2002).

On another level, it can also create friction between teachers who are native speakers and those who are not and might then see themselves as somehow being ‘second best’. Kramsch (1993) argues that a native speaker model should not be imposed because learners have ‘rights’ to use the foreign language for ‘their own purposes’. Finally and most importantly, it can never be the aim of learning another language, to mimic the accent and perceived behaviours of native speakers. After all, in the case of my own native language, English - one out of five of the world’s population speaks English to some level of proficiency and 1,400 million people live in countries where English has official status (Graddol, 1997:2). There is not just one English language and culture and this is true of most languages and cultures because they are always travelling and changing through the generations of people who use them. They are always crossing borders.

van Ek’s model might be incomplete, but the value of his focus on sociocultural aspects of learning and the need for learners to develop *social competences* in addition to just

linguistic ones is a positive step towards seeing language learning as human interaction and not just some kind of mechanical exchanging of information.

It is the qualities of self-reflection, challenging ideas, questioning the unconscious, thinking critically and engaging with difference to learn with others while enriching the self, that Byram equates to the sojourner, which is at the heart of what he calls ‘intercultural communicative competence.’:

*The phrase deliberately maintains a link with recent traditions in foreign language teaching, but **expands** the concept of ‘communicative competence’ in significant ways.*

(Byram, 1997b:3)

Just as it would be naïve to consider language learning as a linguistic exercise, it would be equally inadequate to think of communication as the simple exchange of information and sending of messages which has often dominated ‘communicative language teaching’ methodology. Communication depends on the whole context of who is communicating with whom and how what is said or written will be interpreted by the other person. This depends on the appropriate use of language and register, but it also hinges on being able to ‘decentre’ oneself (Byram, 1997b). To decentre oneself does not mean giving up or changing our identities or our way of doing things. That would be wrong and indeed counterproductive to social cohesion and understanding. Decentring is all about being able to put yourself in someone else’s shoes and it is about being sensitive to difference rather than rejecting otherness or imposing one way over another. It is not just about a brief moment of exchange but about ‘establishing and maintaining relationships’ (Byram, 1997b:3). One of the world’s most famous and successful businessmen, Sir Richard Branson, writes in his autobiography that ‘it is not opening doors which is difficult, but *keeping them open*’ (Branson, 1999).

To understand our human identities, we have to look for those things we share in common with all other humans. According to Turner (1994) we have three types of identities: human, social and personal. Therefore our human relationships involve those views of ourselves that we believe we share with all other human beings. Mahatma

Ghandi once said that ‘no culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive’ and in his book aptly named *The Buried Mirror*, Carlos Fuentes discusses these ‘hidden dimensions’ (in Hall, 1966) of our relationships with other people which are an integral part of learning to communicate with otherness and at the core of intercultural communicative competence:

... people and their cultures perish in isolation, but they are born or reborn in contact with other men and women, with men and women of another culture, another creed, another race. If we do not recognize our humanity in others, we shall not recognize it in ourselves.

(Fuentes, 1992:34)

Any intercultural approach to foreign language teaching/learning must see linguistic competence in a much wider context. Therefore van Ek’s model of ‘social competence’ is expanded to ‘sociocultural competence’ (Gudykunst et al., 1994). Gudykunst (et al.) characterise one of the main ‘motivations’ to learn another language as the need ‘for a common shared world’. The qualities of the so-called ‘competent communicator’ is the need to *create* this common shared world *with other people*. Gudykunst (et al.) were not really interested in linguistic competence in itself but rather in developing the knowledge and skills which people need to learn in order to communicate with one another and avoid conflicts, but from an intra-group rather than an intercultural/interlingual perspective. However Gudykunst (et al.) contribution is significant because of the interactive ‘dialogue’ they establish between people who are communicating. Communication is not automatic or straightforward but complex and full of pitfalls as well. Relationships are not static but need to be ‘created’ and ‘negotiated in a process of socialisation over time’ (Gudykunst et al., 1994:169).

The implication of this interactionist perspective is that teachers of foreign languages should not provide representations and certain fixed bodies of knowledge about other cultures. Instead, learners should be given the means of accessing and analysing cultural practices so that their learning process becomes something which begins from their own cultures and experiences and moves out from each student into the new cultures and

practices they encounter. In a paper he gave at Roskilde University in 1993, H. Christiansen writes that ‘the quest for culture as essence and object has to be abandoned in favour of method, i.e. a process of investigation where every single encounter potentially involves different values, opinions and world views.’

A further dimension to intercultural language teaching/learning is added through the work of Bourdieu (1994) who talks about the power which each social group brings into a relationship. Rather like Orwell’s famous dichotomy that ‘we are all equal but some are more equal than others’, Bourdieu argues that access to certain cultural fields is conditioned by the ‘cultural capital’ that an individual has and which can only be acquired in particular educational institutions. Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘field’ and ‘capital’ are central concepts in intercultural and multicultural education, particularly at university level where students have attained the social status of being amongst the ‘highly educated elite of society’. Hence foreign language teaching/learning should not introduce learners to a culture in a way that it only presents them with the dominant interests, beliefs, behaviours and meanings that are held by ‘a powerful minority’ (Bourdieu:1994).

The argument for developing learners’ understanding of the beliefs, behaviours and meanings of the culture they are studying is that it will help them to develop intuition, sensitivity and awareness to prepare them to work, travel and communicate within an international and multicultural marketplace. It is clear that learners cannot acquire the knowledge of all the cultural identities and situations that they will come across in a foreign environment and so they cannot be provided with a kind of ‘culture package’ with lots of bits of information like a travel guide. This would be like Thomas Gradgrind’s school in Dicken’s novel *Hard Times* where students have to learn facts ‘because facts alone are wanted in life.’ (Dickens, 1854:47).

It is evident that interaction in language classrooms will make some reference to the national culture and identity of the country/peoples in question but ‘this must be combined with developing in learners the methods to cope with other situations, based on this example’. There should be a focus on ‘methods as well as content’. (Byram,

1997b:18). In this way, the dominant culture will be undermined in favour of methods to prepare students for a variety of ‘intercultural encounters’. Secondly, as the students are given autonomy in their language learning, they will *discover* cultural practices and differences for themselves, rather than having ideas imposed on them. Finally, an intercultural approach to language learning will encourage students to compare these practices with their own and hopefully to thus engage with otherness from their own perspectives: ‘the analysis becomes critical.’ (Byram, 1997b:20).

In order for students to become competent intercultural communicators, focusing on methods and experiential activities is not sufficient. It demands that these are preceded and followed by theoretical input and above all by reflection:

*The **critical** intercultural speaker takes critical advantage of the world opened wide to her/him by appreciating the different narratives available, by reflecting on how they articulate, how they are positioned in terms of each other and how their positions affect their perspectives.*

(Guilherme, 2002:129)

The next chapter will therefore focus on various models for teaching/learning intercultural communicative competence.

2.3 Models for Intercultural Competence

The question of being intercultural is a question of understanding the difference it makes to be the languaging link between multiple worlds.

(Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004:28)

Intercultural communication as a field of study was established after the Second World War and stemmed from the works of the anthropologist, E.T. Hall, *The Silent Language*, *The Hidden Dimension*, and *Beyond Culture* published between 1961 and 1976. Its first applications were not in the field of education at all, but in training courses for American Diplomats, mainly for the Peace Corps and later in a whole diasporas of training programmes to help the likes of business people, social workers, international students and refugees to adapt to new cultural contexts and to prepare them in both a practical and psychological sense to communicate more effectively with people from other cultures. In *The Silent Language* (1961), Hall states that there is a crucial link between communication and culture, indeed ‘language is culture’ and ‘culture is communication’ (Hall, 1961: 119-26). It is not just what we say which is important, but also what we don’t say, i.e. non-verbal communication like gestures, space, time, touch, eye-contact and all the intricacies which are part of successful communication. There had been studies of communication before Hall like Sapir-Whorf’s (1940) linguistic relativity theory and Georg Simmel’s concept of the ‘stranger’, but it was Hall who evolved the concept of intercultural communication as it is used today, namely as the ‘intersection of culture and communication.’ Hall also pointed out that cultural communication implies choice because ‘no culture has devised a means for talking without highlighting some things at the expense of some other things.’ (Hall, 1961:120). The success of *The Silent Language* brought Hall into contact with many scholars and moved his work into academic circles and notably into the fields of foreign language research and education.

During the 1990’s several models of Intercultural Communicative Competence were developed. The most significant of these to this study is Byram’s model because of its central role in the Council of Europe’s documents on the future framework of foreign

language teaching in Europe. I will focus on Byram's model in the next chapter but it is important to refer to the key points made in other research models on how (inter) cultural competencies might be acquired because they have all contributed to the growing importance and development of critical cultural awareness in foreign language/culture teaching in recent years.

Like Hall, Brislin and Yoshida (1994) developed their theories of intercultural communication through their work in training courses and workshops, where they developed programmes to prepare professionals from different cultures to communicate successfully. In their model for intercultural communication, the authors outline a four step approach to communicating with people from other cultures as follows: (1) Awareness; (2) Knowledge; (3) Emotions (including attitudes to otherness) and (4) Skills (involving visible behaviour)' (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994:26). 'Awareness' involves the learners in not just learning about and being aware of others' values, but also reflecting on their own and on how these values interact and affect behaviour and interaction with other people. As far as knowledge is concerned, practical knowledge is not sufficient preparation. Learners need 'Culture-General Knowledge' which includes information about the history, geography and economy of the country in question, as well as an awareness of the anxiety, emotions and misunderstandings which occur in any intercultural encounter. The authors propose role-play and simulations to raise what they describe as a sense of 'world-mindedness' in students so that they learn how to deal with the 'general feelings' generated by any intercultural experience (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994: 165-71).

Even though Brislin and Yoshida's ideas are based in a North American context and their work is developed within the field of professional training courses on intercultural communication, their contribution to foreign language/culture teaching is relevant for two reasons. Firstly, the teaching of foreign languages and cultures should not be 'atomised' (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004) into lots of fragmented courses with names which begin 'English/German/Spanish for ...'. If students who learn languages for business studies learn all about other cultural values and intercultural experiences, attitudes and etiquette, why shouldn't all language students learn these skills? Future

foreign language teachers will have to acquire this knowledge, apply these skills and use these competencies, too - both in their own professional lives and in their foreign language/culture classrooms among their students. Secondly and especially at university level, one cannot lose sight of the fact that students are being prepared for the world of work in a competitive and international marketplace and therefore the realms of business and education need to work side-by-side.

Bennett's model is an important one because it focuses on the element of personal growth and awareness that occurs in an intercultural encounter. Each individual 'constructs' reality in a personal way and 'accommodates' cultural difference which then 'constitutes development' (Bennett, 1993:24). Bennett identifies two main stages of this process which he calls 'ethnocentric' and 'ethnorelative'. Within the 'ethnocentric stage' the author distinguishes three interrelated levels which are 'denial', 'defence' and 'minimization'. If two people from different cultures are to communicate successfully, it will therefore be necessary to try to emphasise common ground rather than difference and otherness through 'denial' and 'minimalization'. 'Defence' is to avoid building walls between people by making value judgements about them and again trying to establish the universal human characteristics that bind us together as human beings, rather than as people from different races and cultures.

Bennett also defines three levels in the 'ethnorelative' stage which he describes as 'acceptance', 'adaptation' and 'integration'. Cultures should hence be understood through their relationships to one another and one's own world view as a 'relative cultural construct' (cultural self-awareness), (Bennett, 1993:50/1). If we are to communicate successfully it is necessary to be 'sensitive' to the other culture by first accepting and respecting that culture. The next level is 'adaptation' which is to intensify the relationship to different cultural patterns and behaviours through 'empathy' (later a key notion in Byram's model of intercultural competence) and sometimes by even 'giving up one's world view' even if only temporarily. This notion of *empathy* is particularly significant because it means that to establish a successful and productive relationship with someone from another culture, one has to have the ability to understand and accept another perspective. This is not a one-sided relationship because

as each person treads into new cultural territory and adapts new aspects of cultural behaviour, they are becoming enriched. In other words, intercultural skills are an ‘additive to one’s native skills’ (Bennett, 1993:51).

The climax of the intercultural encounter and ‘intercultural sensitivity’ is what Bennett calls ‘integration’. This integration occurs at two levels which are ‘contextual evaluation’ and ‘constructive evaluation’. The former involves integrating aspects of two or more cultures into a new identity through self-reflection and through the ability to evaluate different situations and act without necessarily conforming to one established cultural framework. ‘Constructive evaluation’ is to take integration a step further. It is really when one is no longer just a tourist but a perhaps more of a traveller or as Byram says a ‘sojourner’ who has become independent from the constraints of culture and who learnt to communicate at a ‘transcultural level’ (p.51), which means that there is no necessary attachment to one cultural framework or another. Bennett’s model is important because of the elements of self-reflection and empathy it establishes in intercultural communication. Its main concern is to raise awareness of one’s attitudes to difference and it suggests that disparate responses to difference may occur and so it is necessary to be able to step out of one’s own cultural shoes into those of another. Self-reflection addresses an important pedagogical issue of the intercultural encounter which is a call for students to think critically about the differences in other cultures and also to raise their awareness to similarities and shared meanings.

Before moving on to Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence, I would like to refer to the work of two women in the field of communicating and integrating culture *actively* into language teaching. The first of these is Damen whose research in the 1980s was a major contribution towards validating the role culture should play in foreign language classes. In her diagram ‘*The Mirror of Culture*’ she defines intercultural communication as self awareness, empathy, tolerance, awareness and acceptance of diversity and lack of ethnocentrism. She talks of culture as the ‘fifth dimension’ of learning a language alongside the four skills. Though this may seem modest nowadays, in the 1980s Damen’s model challenged the marginalisation of culture and proposed intercultural communication as a ‘main goal’ of language

teaching/learning and she also challenged the domination of ‘one’ culture as a model which is certainly still relevant today as illustrated by the way in which British and American cultures dominate the ELT (English Language Teaching) curricula: ‘Whose culture? What culture? What rules? What patterns?’ (Damen, 1987:20). She goes on to identify the fact that communicating in another language is not a straightforward transfer from one language into another, but that intercultural communication often leads to misunderstandings and miscommunication. Hence language teaching is itself an intercultural encounter:

Damen’s work may be considered a milestone in the reinforcement of a revival of cultural content and of the introduction of a new framework in foreign language education that provided foundations for new developments such as critical pedagogy of foreign language/culture education.

(Guilherme, 2002:138)

Kramersch’s work in the field of teaching/learning foreign languages is inspiring because she emphasises the key role of the language teacher in teaching culture through that language and not as some kind of separate entity. Learning a language is not just complex in terms of learning grammar and structures, but even more so in terms of the human interaction involved in using a language successfully:

*The responsibility of the language teacher is to teach culture **as it is mediated through language**, not as it is studied by social scientists and anthropologists.*

(Kramersch, 1998, her emphasis)

In her model (1993) she identifies three tiers of intercultural communication. The first is ‘understanding others’ and then ‘making yourself understood’ and the final and perhaps most formative part of the experience (which is often neglected in classroom practice) is ‘understanding yourself’ (Kramersch, 1993:183). This third perspective or ‘third space’ as Bhabha calls it, is significant because as Kramersch says in the quotation above, ‘culture is *mediated* through language’ and this third place or ‘space’ needs to be actively created by those involved in communicating. It is their own unique and personal space.

In Kramersch's view, culture is created during this dialogue and exchange of ideas and emotions between 'particular individuals with particular stories and visions.' (Kramersch, 1993: 221). This is significant in the sense that it is the *individuals* who are important in the act of communicating because of the cultures, beliefs and stories that they bring into each dialogue with other individuals. In order to reach this 'cross-cultural understanding' (p.27), Kramersch recommends four steps as follows (C1= own culture / C2 = foreign culture):

1. *Reconstruct the context of production and reception of the text within the foreign culture (C2, C2).*
2. *Construct with the foreign learners their own context of reception, i.e. find an equivalent phenomenon in C1 and construct that C1 phenomenon with its own network of meanings (C1, C1).*
3. *Examine the way in which C1 and C2 contexts in part determine C1 and C2, i.e. the way each culture views the other.*
4. *Lay the ground for a dialogue that could lead to change.*

(Kramersch, 1993: 210)

Kramersch's model is relevant to language education at university because it highlights the autonomous role of the language learners in an intercultural discourse. What the students bring into their own 'context of reception' is not imposed on them either by a native speaker model of what to say and how to say it, or on just the culture of the native speaker, because what each individual brings into the discourse is just as relevant and will affect the outcomes of intercultural communication. Dialogues can 'lead to change' and so language and culture are not set in the stone of authentic materials nor is the language 'owned' by the native speakers of a language. Languages and cultures grow and develop through exchange and interaction with others. No man is an island just as no culture is an island. Kramersch affirms that this 'third perspective' takes place only 'if it is integrated into critical pedagogy' that transforms both 'the transactional' and 'interactional' discourses in the classroom. (Kramersch, 1993: 243-4). In other words, the students must engage in exchanging information and afterwards the 'understanding

of the self' should be encouraged and elicited through discussion between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves. Seen from this perspective, language and culture go hand-in-hand and students learn about others and themselves in an active and interactive way through individual exploration, interpretation, description and discovery. The role of the teacher which emerges from Kramersch's model is that of a person who creates these learning contexts and gives students the freedom to explore them and then at the end brings the learning experiences together through discussion and reflection.

In the next section (2.4), I will focus in detail on Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence because it moves beyond foreign culture education towards critical cultural pedagogy and cultural politics, essential in preparing students to be active citizens in a multilingual and pluricultural world.

2.4 Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence.

The conviction that acquiring intercultural communicative competence (ICC), involves a lot more than just familiarity with a body of knowledge about a particular target culture or groups of cultures, is what lies at the heart of Byram's model of ICC. It is *knowledge* which is at the basis of Byram's model but it is not some fixed body of cultural knowledge. Rather it is a knowledge which embraces the whole act and process of human communication and interaction. (Byram, 1997b). It is not just about the strategies skills and competences involved in learning language-and-culture. It is also about *raising awareness* towards the social and personal contexts of intercultural communication, including non-verbal dimensions. In order to communicate effectively with other cultures, several 'knowledges' are required.

In his model of 'Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence' (1997b), Byram outlines four elements that correspond to the different spheres of knowledge within intercultural interaction and communication: (a) *savoirs*; (b) *savoir comprendre*; (c) *savoir être*; (d) *savoir apprendre/faire*. However I would like to focus on Byram's second and more elaborate model of intercultural communicative competence because of its fifth and perhaps most important dimension of '*savoir s'engager*'. (Byram, 1997b). *Savoir s'engager* includes political education and critical cultural awareness which are changing demands in language education at all levels, but perhaps most especially in language teaching-and-learning at university. Being able to *engage* with others suggests autonomous learning and the need for students to be able to apply skills and competences across a range of disciplines and knowledge areas. It is significant that in his second model of ICC, Byram has put education – *savoir s'engager* – at the centre of his model. Education is not a collection of random skills and competencies. It is the knowledge about oneself and others which enables people in society to engage with one another and interact. It is the ability to recognise one's own values and perspectives as being *part* of a whole range of values and perspectives and not as the only ones or as the dominant ones. It is the capacity to be able to interpret what is new by comparing, analysing and relating different concepts. It is about our

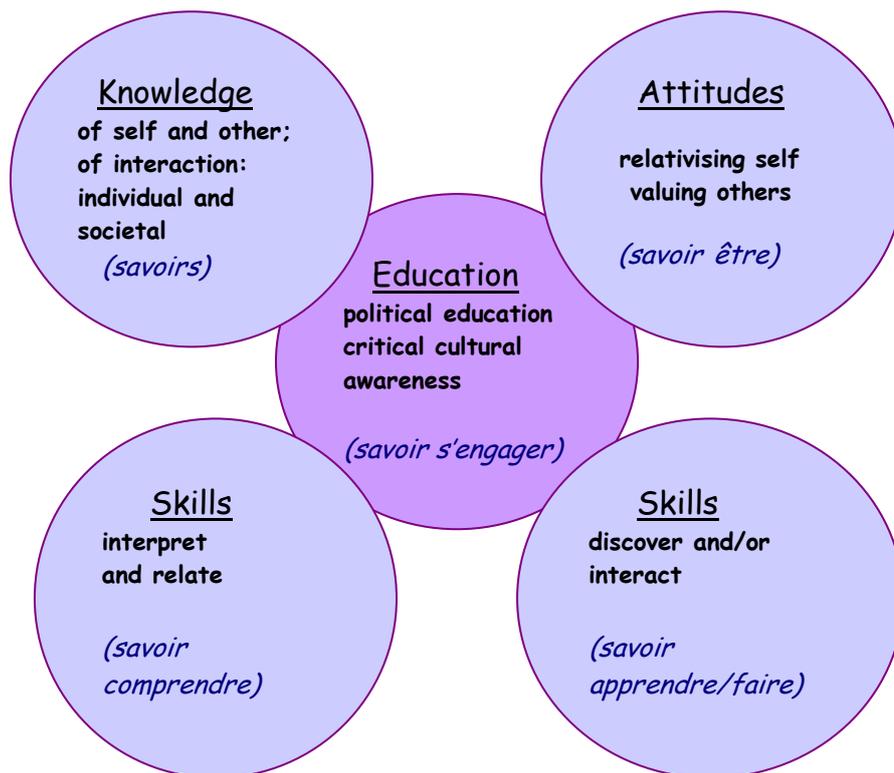
attitudes and openness to recognise and tolerate otherness and difference. Finally it is about developing the skills needed to communicate and interact with other people and about fostering interest and curiosity to learn and discover.

According to Byram, education - *savoir s'engager*- is about developing critical cultural awareness in our students and it is a 'crucial educational aim' for foreign language teaching-and-learning (1997b: 43). This recognises that language-and-culture education does not take place in a vacuum, neither can it be a process of learning grammatical forms and structures. It is a living, interactive process between individuals, groups and societies which must be mediated, reflected upon and discussed. It is '*political education*' which involves an '*ability to evaluate critically on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries*' (Byram, 1997b: 53).

In figure 2 on page 46, is a representation of Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence which shows how the five *savoirs* are all important factors in themselves, but at the same time they are interdependent because they operate together during successful intercultural exchange, languaging and understanding. A description of each of the *savoirs* and what they involve will follow this diagram.

Figure 2

Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (1997b)*



* This figure has been adapted from Michael Byram's original tabular representation of the five *savoirs*. I have chosen to represent the *savoirs* in the form of interlocking circles with education as the central element. It is education and knowing how to **apply that education appropriately and critically** - *savoir s'engager* - which holds the other parts together and creates the links between knowledge and attitudes and between the skills of interpreting and interacting.

It is clear from Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence that there are always two levels of interaction going on in an intercultural encounter, namely the thoughts, attitudes and knowledge of the self which are being related, adapted, modified and questioned through exchange with the other. This idea of the active intercultural being forging links with otherness is at the centre of Byram's model. For Alison Phipps, being intercultural 'is a question of understanding *the difference it makes to be the languaging link between multiple worlds*' (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004:28, my italics).

An intercultural person is an active, communicative and reflective being. Attitudes (*savoir être*) are not fixed ideas or stereotypes that are brought into intercultural communication as some kind of template of how others behave. Such fixed perceptions tend to hinder successful communication and cause discord. Consider how often daily negotiations come to a head because of questions of 'attitude'. Instead of blocking, rejecting and dismissing what is different, one has to learn to engage with others in an open-minded and reflective way. Byram talks about 'curiousness', 'readiness' and 'willingness' to communicate. Instead of rejecting what is new or different, ask questions and reflect about similar experiences and situations and try to accommodate them into your own framework of knowledge. Intercultural Communicative Competence is 'a willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviours, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging' (Byram, 1997b:34).

Central to this flexibility and openness to otherness is the need to 'decentre' oneself. Melde (1987) suggests that this ability to step back and show interest in other people and their values is 'fundamental to understanding other cultures' (in Byram & Morgan, 1994:20-4). It is certain that communication breaks down almost immediately if other people approach you with unfounded opinions or hearsay about your culture, or value-laden attitudes and expectations on the lines of '*all ... people are like that*'. It is true that we all bring values into our interactions with otherness, but attitudes can be fostered in the language classroom that help students to make 'informed' judgments which 'allow a

conscious control of biased interpretation' (Byram, 1997b:35). Byram goes on to say that in an educational framework which aims to 'develop critical cultural awareness', it is necessary to 'relativise' the self and 'value' the other through *empathy*, rather than by taking an analytical stance. Empathy is indeed essential in this sensitising of the self to Otherness and it is a delicate process if it is not to turn into sympathy, which tends to patronise and alienate the other person. Lomas (1993) talks about empathy in relation to therapy and asserts that it is the 'art of being able to place oneself within the experience of the other and to feel, in some measure, what it is like to be him.' (in Alred, Byram & Fleming, 2003:19).

Knowledge (*savoirs*) is at once the knowledge dimension that individuals bring into the intercultural interaction of their own social groups and cultures as well as similar knowledge about other cultures, societies and communication processes. Knowledge of ourselves is developed through primary and secondary socialisation, largely in the family, the social groups we belong to and in our formal education. However much of this knowledge is taken for granted because it is part of everyday life. The fact that these values and beliefs are taken for granted can cause communication to break down when people from different cultures try to negotiate meaning. Byram defends that people need to be made *aware* of their own socialisation and the ways that they interact and relate in their own societies so that they can function effectively in others.

Thus knowledge or *savoirs* are 'relational', i.e. how people from one country might perceive people from another one, and 'the effect of that interaction between individuals' (Byram, 1997b:51). This seems to be especially significant in considering how languages should be taught and learnt effectively. The target language-and-culture should be studied in relation to the students' own language, culture and way of seeing the world for it to make sense and for new experiences to be integrated and understood. This is how we communicate interculturally – through curiosity, empathy and *discovery*.

In this way, rather than accumulating a series of instances and 'collective representations' of different lifestyles and cultures which can be both problematic and

restrictive, students can become more aware of their own cultures through the processes of comparing and contrasting different aspects. Instead of seeing difference as a 'problem', students *expect* differences in other cultures and approach them as something which is positive and interesting to discover and compare to their own lifestyles. I have used the word 'representations' here because each individual sees culture in different ways. One person might talk about the Royal Family as a central facet of British cultural identity, while another might think it is football or soap operas. It is not enough to provide students with these generalised 'collective representations' because that is all they are. Instead, each person should be given the opportunity to explore, discover and place culture within their own perspectives and world views. Cultural knowledge should not be *imposed* but acquired through experience, interaction, study and reflection.

Savoir comprendre involves the skills of interpreting and relating. Byram defines these skills as 'the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own.' (Byram, 1997b: 52). The ability to reach an understanding of the other culture is what lies at the core of *savoir comprendre*. It is essentially the capacity to be able to mediate between one's own culture and cultural beliefs and a new cultural environment, by drawing upon previous knowledge and understanding of how the world works. These are the skills which enable some people to quickly adapt to new situations and experiences because they use the space between what is known and unknown (the *mediation* space, if you like) to compare and reflect and then they enter into the 'new' field. It is the capacity to compare another cultural world with one's own and then to interpret, relate and finally *integrate* the new experience. Real learning is all about understanding, but when we are confronted with something totally new to us, understanding takes time and reflection. 'Do you understand?' is perhaps one of the most frequent questions posed by teachers, however in most instances, it is just a way of reassurance that, in fact, someone is paying attention. Hence the true sense of 'understanding' as something that we integrate into our personal fields of knowledge and experiences has somehow become lost in translation. In order to integrate new knowledge, there is a much more gradual process which is not an instantaneous, 'Yes, I understand', but an interplay of questions that

need answers in order to fit the new information into our scheme of things. It is not just about understanding words in a foreign language, but how, where and when these words are used and by whom. We cannot understand language even at a very basic level without cultural context and background knowledge. Even the most simple of sentences can hide a whole plethora of meanings depending on the above variables. Consider everyday words like ‘interesting’ or ‘different’: a really interesting meeting; an interesting combination of colours / How interesting! / Hmm ...well, it’s different. / You look different. /It was a different kind of holiday. All these examples can have positive or negative meanings depending on the context.

Therefore Byram says that teaching people how to communicate effectively with other cultures means teaching them to ‘ask people’ questions about their views, their values and their behaviours because most of these have become second nature to them and so they are taken for granted. They are essentially unconscious and not easy to explain because they have become part of routines and everyday living. Perhaps some new experiences won’t be integrated at all because they don’t fit into our cultural mindsets. But I believe that to *learn* from experience, *we have to experience ourselves*. We cannot truly learn something just from another person telling us what an experience ‘is like’. Therefore *savoir comprendre* is a way of sensitising students to the reality that experiences can be good or bad and while good experiences are always preferable, we learn through both, and both are valuable and part of our growth as human beings.

Savoir apprendre/faire are the skills of ‘discovery and interaction’. It is discovery of both the other and of ourselves. Nothing makes us sit up and think more about the way we behave or think than if someone from another culture confronts us about it. When I lived in England, I never thought about my identity or about being ‘English’ or why I always apologise, why I only buy fresh milk, or why I sip my coffee or drink wine without food. Hence this ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and practices is a crucial one in the foreign language-and-culture classroom.

It seems to me that the value of learning a foreign language with a native speaker of that language lies as much in the culture that this person brings into the classroom as it does

in their linguistic knowledge. However it is a pre-requisite that these native speakers are not cocooned in their own cultural ex-pat communities, but that they are integrated into the foreign culture and language that they are living in. This way they can truly be a resource to the students because they are an *active* part of the language-and-culture exchange in the classroom and they are discovering and interacting along with the students. It is true that students respond much more positively and enthusiastically to someone who has made to effort to learn their language and who takes an interest in their cultures and lifestyles, too. A classroom like this where ideas and viewpoints can be exchanged, compared and discussed is a place where real communication and learning takes place. The adult environment of foreign language classrooms at university and the presence of native speakers and students from a whole range of backgrounds and countries seems an ideal and unique starting place to prepare students to live and participate actively in an international community.

Byram compares the skills of *savoir apprendre/faire* to those of the ethnographer – someone who can observe and discover how other people behave, think and communicate.

Critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) is perhaps the most important aspect of intercultural communication because it involves evaluating and judging other cultures and values based on the perspectives and values of one's own culture. It is about engaging, comparing and reflecting. At university level language students have already been studying the foreign language-and-culture for several years. At schools in Portugal, most of their language-and-culture learning has been geared towards tests where it is usually the norm to read a text and answer questions about it. Throughout their studies to date, students have most often been provided with materials to study with formulas to answer certain types of questions and taught how to respond in certain ways. The first 'shock' for young people when they come to university is that they are often expected to do independent research and to be able to participate in dialogues and whole class interactions by giving their *own* opinions and ideas. They frequently have to organise and present their ideas to others. They have to take on a responsibility for their own learning and study. The language class at university is therefore an ideal forum in

which to question ideas and beliefs that have often been accepted without questioning or understood without understanding. One of the roles of foreign language teachers at university is therefore to develop skills, attitudes and awareness of values alongside knowledge of a particular culture or country:

...learners can be encouraged to identify the ways in which particular practices and beliefs maintain the social position and power of particular groups. The analysis can become critical. Furthermore, the analysis can be comparative, turning learners' attention back on their own practices, beliefs and social identities – and to the groups to which they do or do not belong – and this analysis too can be critical.

(Byram, 1997b:20)

Hence *savoir s'engager* is the development of a 'life-skill' which should be part of university education and which reinforces human values and embraces plurality. It is important to emphasise that making students aware of other values is not an attempt to change those values. What is significant about Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence is that it makes learners become aware of their own values and how these influence the way they perceive and evaluate others and indeed themselves. It is a model which acknowledges *respect* for others, which fosters human dignity and value and through critical engagement with others, it encourages a democratic basis for social interaction.

2.5 Defining Critical Pedagogy and Critical Cultural Awareness.

In the previous section, Byram's model of ICC was discussed, as was the concept of the *savoirs*, particularly '*savoir s'engager*' which is understood as the political dimension of language education. In this section I would like to briefly define and develop the ideas of critical pedagogy and outline the importance and value of a critical approach to foreign language teaching-and-learning at university.

Critical Pedagogy (CP) is not a method for teaching/learning culture. CP is a pedagogy that *includes* teaching but teaching and learning as part of a process to produce and create knowledge. It is a pedagogy 'because it refers to the process by which students and teachers *negotiate* and *produce* meaning (McClaren, 1995:34), (my italics). Furthermore pedagogy is a broader term which implies a 'project' (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004, Guilherme, 2002) that takes place at school, but does not end there. It consists of previous and ongoing experiences and entails a vision for both the present and the future. It is as Wink (1997) suggests, a way of life, which is why it is as impossible to define, as life itself would be: 'I doubt I can teach someone how to *do* critical pedagogy. We do not *do* critical pedagogy; we *live* it' (Wink, 1997:103).

Seen in this light, pedagogy informs teaching by giving it meaning and purpose. It is about cultural, social and political engagement. It is Byram's vision of education as *savoir s'engager* because it provides the possibility for teachers and students to construct their views of themselves and the world in an active way as opposed to simply interpreting culture as if it were somehow static and predefined. In a 21st century European community of mobility, technological innovation and great multilingual and cultural diversity, the artificial constructs of national borders and identities have become blurred and our descriptions of other peoples and cultures have been transformed:

Others' do not begin and end at national boundaries, fitting into neat identity capsules ... peoples are characterised in their diversity and plurality rather than their singularity

and oneness. Moreover, 'cultures' are neither fixed nor static, but in a constant process of renegotiation and re-invention.

(Moreira, 1999:282)

Just as cultures and peoples are constantly evolving, critical pedagogy is also considered to be a movement which is 'ever-evolving' (Giroux & Shannon, 1997: xii). It is central to the concept of intercultural communication because besides applying a 'language of critique', it also engages in a 'language of hope' that aims towards democratic education and social improvement (Giroux, 1992). In his introduction to Giroux's work, *Teachers as Intellectuals*, Freire outlines how CP is a political act and may be regarded as educational and social reform that starts from within the school:

I believe that central to a realizable critical pedagogy is the need to view schools as democratic public spheres. This means regarding schools as democratic sites dedicated to forms of self and social empowerment. In these terms, schools are public places where students learn the knowledge and skills necessary to live in an authentic democracy.

(Freire in Giroux, 1988: xxxii)

Viewed through the perspective of CP, the ultimate goal of schools and indeed education should be to prepare and empower students to become critical citizens who can live and be mobile within authentic democracies. This goal can only be achieved through the *active* participation and collaboration of teachers and students through the production of knowledge and the training of skills, attitudes and competences aimed at both personal and social development.

Critical Pedagogy is intrinsically related to culture, power and communication. It enables teachers and students of foreign languages to create different approaches to language learning due to the new perspectives offered by intercultural knowledge (Hones, 1999). This 'intercultural knowledge' is related to life and exchanged by both the teachers and students who bring it to life:

Critical knowledge is knowledge that is appropriated and made meaningful by teachers and learners alike. A critical pedagogy adopts both a questioning and a proactive stance by combining description, reflection and interpretation with exploration, creation and intervention.

(Guilherme, 2002:217)

According to Giroux, critical educators are: (a) reflective practitioners; (b) dialogue facilitators; and (c) transformative intellectuals. He goes on to say that teachers should *engage in dialogue* and try to make knowledge ‘meaningful, critical and ultimately emancipatory.’ Students should be treated as ‘critical agents’ who ‘question how knowledge is produced’ (Giroux, 1988:175). This attempt to actively engage students and teachers in a working and productive relationship is what foreign language learning at university should be all about. Students need to be given opportunities to discuss things and reflect about new knowledge and experience. It is all about getting people *involved* in the learning process. Guilherme emphasises that students need to develop ‘a commitment to critical learning and a fulfilment of their roles as individuals and citizens’ (Guilherme, 2002:219). In order to do this, she continues, both students and teachers must ‘engage in a dialogue of empowerment, action and hope’.

Approaching foreign language study through the lens of critical pedagogy is essential because it does not only acknowledge the input of facts in political, historical, social or geographical data. Instead, it focuses on the complexity of hidden meanings, underlying realities and values that define social spaces and make people behave and react in certain ways. Therefore ‘students must engage in knowledge as border-crossers’ (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991: 118). This means that they must locate different cultural codes and look beyond the obvious to identify the deep-rootedness of traditions and ways of living:

The knowledge of the ‘other’ is engaging not simply to celebrate its presence, but also it must be interrogated critically with respect to the ideologies it contains, the means of

representation it utilizes, and the underlying social practices it confirms.

(Giroux, 1988:106)

The word 'interrogation' has powerful connotations. Critical cultural awareness is not a simple expansion of topics or a case of sticking to general collective representations of culture as a kind of safe haven. In 1995, a study carried out in Portugal by Branco and Moreira into teachers' perceptions of their role as transmitters of culture, revealed that 'almost no attention had been given to the need to allow learners to discover new perceptions of social reality, of different ways of solving social, aesthetical or economical problems, thus improving their understanding of cultural differences and expectations' (Branco & Moreira, 1996:590). Learning a language is a fantastic experience because it is not just about learning a subject, but also about developing ways and means of communicating with others across linguistic and cultural barriers. By seeing how cultures differ, students are being exposed to diversity and difference and the teacher's role here should be to develop capacities and strategies to deal positively with difference. Difference is, after all, a good thing because it broadens horizons and it is what makes us feel that we are living, learning, observing, experiencing and progressing.

Thus critical pedagogy focuses on presenting alternatives to students' frames of mind and widening their horizons and perspectives. 'Such borderlands should be seen as sites for both critical analysis and as a potential source of experimentation, creativity and possibility' (Giroux, 1992:34). These characteristics provide a strong link between CP and ethics and Giroux regards ethics as a 'central concern' of critical pedagogy, as are questions of human rights, dignity and emancipation:

Ethics must be seen as a central concern of critical pedagogy. This suggests that educators should attempt to understand more fully how different discourses offer students diverse ethical referents for structuring their relationship with wider society... Thus ethics is taken up as a struggle against inequality and as a discourse for expanding human rights.

(Giroux, 1992:74)

To conclude this section, it is evident that the political element in critical pedagogy involves taking a stance and expressing an opinion. It is about speaking, listening, being heard and becoming actively involved. It is about attitude and process, and students need the conditions to be able to articulate their views, engage in discussion and be given time for reflection, areas of personal interest and research. Giroux & Shannon call a classroom that provides these conditions a 'safe space' where students can 'cross ideological and political borders to clarify their own modern visions' (Giroux & Shannon, 1997:262). Moreover, teachers and students are not at opposite poles of the classroom as the teacher and the learner. Instead they must engage in a 'dialogic relationship' which is the space that students in university should be given to allow them to become more independent, responsible, articulate, assertive and critical as they prepare to move into the world of work and life beyond the 'safe spaces'. It is an open exchange of ideas that makes a difference because it gives the students a sense of empowerment, independence and value that their voices are waiting to be heard. It is liberating:

A pedagogy of dialogue is joyous, serious and challenging. It is galvanising and reflective and it is about communication rather than persuasion, and empowerment rather than assertion.

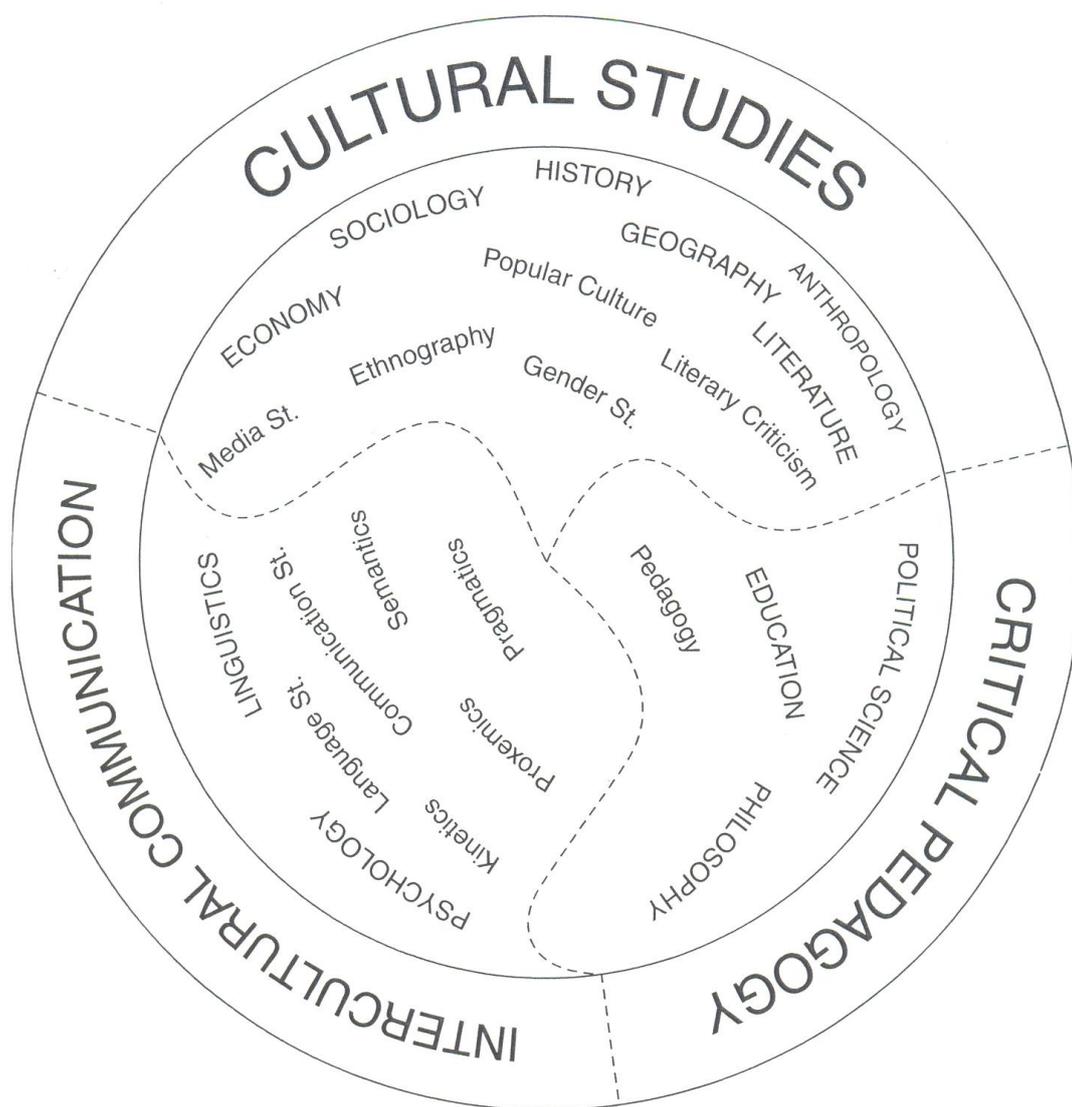
(Guilherme, 2002:48)

Figure 3, on page 58, from Guilherme (2002), illustrates the link between Cultural Studies, Critical Pedagogy and Intercultural Communication and establishes the main interdisciplinary areas within which foreign language-and-culture teaching should operate. These are not fixed areas of study, but rather areas which embrace the study of languages and cultures and give teachers/students of languages a large scope of interests to discover and explore.

Figure 3

An Interdisciplinary Model for Teaching/Learning Foreign Cultures.

(Guilherme, 2002:210)



This diagram establishes the fact that languages, cultures and communication operate across a wide variety of different fields and interests. These are the main interdisciplinary areas within which languages-and-cultures operate and which could offer a range of options for students in higher education to choose from and to discover.

2.6 The Intercultural Speaker and the Question of Cultural Identity

Communication is a continual balancing act, juggling the conflicting needs for intimacy and independence. To survive in the world, we not only have to act in concert with others, but to survive as ourselves, rather than simply as cogs in a wheel, we have to act alone.

(Tannen, 2002:55)

I have chosen to open this chapter about the intercultural speaker and the question of cultural identity through this quote by American writer, Deborah Tannen, because I feel that it encapsulates the chameleon-like stance of the intercultural speaker who is constantly shifting between two or more cultures as a ‘mediator’ (Byram, 1997b) or negotiator in the complex process of intercultural communication and understanding. The choice of ‘speaker’ is significant because an intercultural person is *active* and is participating in the act of communication with other cultures, while also drawing on past experiences and knowledge and comparing the new culture with the known one. Claire Kramsch talks of the intercultural speaker as someone who is curious and explores, a person who is a ‘*broker between cultures of all kinds*’ (Kramsch, 1998:30). It is what Geof Alred calls, ‘*becoming a better stranger*’ (Alred, Byram & Fleming, 2003:14) in an article of the same name.

The foreign language learner used to be and unfortunately often still is someone whose principal aim is to learn the structures and grammar of a linguistic code in order to assimilate and exchange information. Hence language is frequently presented within various cameos of everyday life like shopping, socialising, inviting someone for dinner etc. with culture ‘added-on’ in tips like: ‘It is important to remember that Germans value punctuality.’ There is nothing wrong with providing students with cultural ‘pointers’ but the problem is that they become rigid ‘cultural *rules*’ and are often presented as a *fait accompli*, so that the Germans are like this, the French are like that and the rich diversity and fluidity of culture is lost. Michael Pickering defines this cultural stereotyping as something which is harmful because it is imposed on people

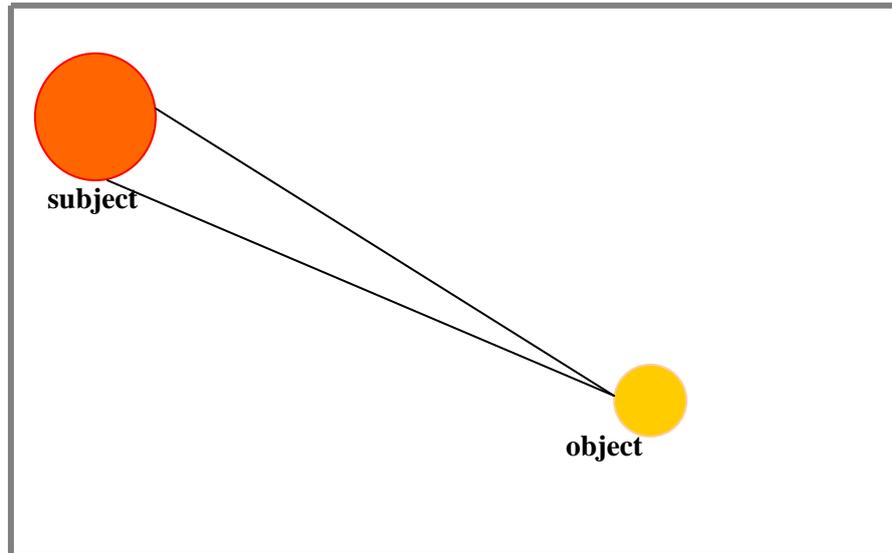
from other cultures, giving them pre-defined identities and breaking down any need or in fact purpose/desire to communicate, (see figure 4, p.62):

It is to be imprisoned in an identity that harms you. You are both silenced and spoken for. You are seen but not recognised. You are identified but denied an identity you can call your own. Your identity is split, broken, dispersed into its abjected images, its alienated representations.

(Pickering, 2001:78)

Figure 4

The *Narrowing* View of Stereotyping Others.



This figure represents how the *potential* of communicating successfully with someone from another culture is limited and often breaks down because of stereotyping.

First of all the interlocutors are not on a par with one another. The foreigner is seen as an 'object' rather than a 'subject' who is on a par with the speaker. The interlocutors maintain a safe distance from one another and if a person from another culture is viewed through the filter of stereotypes and fixed ideas, notice how the communicative space is narrowed down and how the 'foreigner' is placed into an inferior position and made to feel smaller than the subject. All the 'power' is in the words of the subject and so this verbal privilege will usually lead to a breakdown in communications, misunderstandings, upset and negative feelings between the two people.

Languages are therefore markers of identity. They have the potential to signal race, gender, class, power and so can consciously or subconsciously mark superiority or inferiority. Moreover, languages are a sign of belonging and so they can never be neutral. Therefore the learning and teaching of foreign languages has traditionally been based on the distinction between native and non-native speakers. The aim of learning a foreign language is often still focused on trying to learn the rules of the native speaker's standard grammar, vocabulary and idioms. 'The native speaker is supposed to provide the norm against which the non-native speaker's performance is measured.' (Kramsch, 1998). Kramsch continues by affirming the fact that native speakers have thus been given a 'certain authority and privilege' associated with authenticity and legitimacy. She raises the question and credibility of who these native speakers might be and what they represent in our contemporary world of ever-increasing mobility, border crossings and multicultural and multilingual diversity. She also asks how it can be appropriate to learn just *one* kind of standard language when there are increasing linguistic and pragmatic differences among speakers of the same language due to large-scale migrations and the increasing frequency of cross-cultural encounters and exchanges:

In our days of frequent border crossings, and of multilingual and multicultural foreign language classrooms, it is appropriate to rethink the monolingual native speaker norm as the target of foreign language education. As we revisit the marked and unmarked forms of language usership, I propose that we make the intercultural speaker the unmarked form, the infinite language use, and the monolingual, monocultural speaker a slowly disappearing species or a nationalistic myth.

(Kramsch, 1998:30)

It is clear that in the multidimensional linguistic and cultural contexts of contemporary living, both native speakers and non-native speakers potentially belong to several speech communities. Therefore it has become much more appropriate and indeed necessary to move away from a pedagogy defined by native speakers, to a pedagogy oriented towards the intercultural speaker. So who is the intercultural speaker?

In the first instance, it is true to say that language learners usually perceive others and are themselves perceived by others, as belonging to national groups and cultures. Sometimes the idea of being intercultural is perceived as a process of somehow denying one's own culture and identity so as to identify with others. This is not the case. Being intercultural is about *negotiation* and a *disposition* to be interested in other people and in variety and diversity:

Anyone learning another language ... embarks on a voyage of discovery, during which perceptions are altered, unquestioned assumptions about culture and identity are challenged.

(Bassnett, 1997: xviii)

Yet, we cannot discover others unless we 'seek out variety and diversity in our own lives' (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004:27). It is as much about attitude and a predisposition to be open and adaptable to other situations and people as it is about using the foreign language itself. An intercultural speaker is therefore a person who is able to establish a relationship between their own and other cultures. It is an individual who is able to *mediate* between two cultures and embrace difference because they can see the common humanity which unites people (Byram & Zarate, 1997).

It is through such intercultural and indeed multicultural encounters that we become aware of and begin to think about our own identities and unquestioned assumptions because unless we embrace otherness and difference, we tend to think that our values are universal ones. Meeting people from other cultures, who speak other languages and live different lifestyles, not only heightens awareness through the process of reflection and comparison, 'it also serves as a step towards the acceptance of other perspectives, and valuing them as equally acceptable in their own terms (Byram & Morgan, 1994:177). This is a vision of a plurilingual and pluricultural Europe because the more borders we cross, and the more languages we know, the wider our vision of the world is, and the more we understand ourselves and are tolerant and accepting of differences and diversity.

Table 3, on page 66, represents the need to shift the perspective in the foreign language classroom from students as language learners, to students actively learning to be ‘intercultural beings’ (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004). This is a particularly apt and holistic description of what it means to be intercultural. Communicating in words is just part of making a connection with other people. As one student pointed out in one of the focus interviews later in this study, ‘communication also comes from within and so much depends on our attitudes to others and our willingness to listen to them.’

Table 3

From intercultural competence to intercultural being.

	Intercultural competence	Intercultural being
Epistemology	Prescribed by disciplinary paradigms, e.g. literary, geographic, linguistic	Engaged with the whole social world, embodied
	Engagement <i>of</i> self and other	Reflective engagement <i>with</i> self and other
Situations	Learned from and in a discipline Defined by academic fields	Discovered in action, reflection and recursion
Focus	Skills of interpreting, discovery and interaction	Skilful
Education	Political education	Languagers-in-action
Learning context	Classroom conditions predominate	Whole social world
Communication	Language learning	Languaging
Value Orientation	Competence, communication and awareness	Border crossings
Boundary conditions	Knowledge of borders, translation, languages	Being border crossers, translators, languaging links

(Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004:29. Adapted from Barnett, 1994 and Byram, 1997b)

Being intercultural and ‘languaging’ is all about the *people* involved in communicating. It is not a method or a technique of teaching/learning but a way of being that needs to be fostered, encouraged and developed over time. Language learners need to develop intercultural aptitudes, but they also need to *become* intercultural speakers/mediators (Byram, 1997b) and this calls upon their human capacity to be sensitive to others, to listen, to observe and be able to adapt to situations. It is, in sum, an ability to make people *feel at ease* so that genuine communication can take place and an empathy is created. It is having an awareness of the whole social world and not just a language classroom.

The intercultural speaker is often misinterpreted as someone who simply ‘gives up’ their identity for a while and acts as a kind of neutral interlocutor, or someone who affirms the other culture by becoming passive until they can ‘escape’ back into being their ‘real’ selves again. However this simply serves to *acknowledge* difference for a while, but it is not to engage with another person or to take an active interest in them and to really communicate with them. Real human interaction and relationships are all about ups and downs, about self-expression and affirming what you see and feel. At the same time they are about listening to others and thinking about their points of view which clearly also can sometimes involve disagreement and discussion, asking questions, having doubts and miscommunication.

Miscommunication does not mean *failure*, as many would see it, but rather it means that a new approach is needed, a different angle or a new perspective. Reaching an *understanding* with someone from any culture takes time and requires reflection. It does not happen after a single encounter, but over a period of time and through a willingness to be open to others. It is a process of experiencing a variety of different contexts, experiences and emotions between one’s own culture and another:

Understanding is a gradual process ... time is a critical condition in modifying negative perceptions of other people ... some psychological studies suggest that mere exposure and continued proximity to another person increase liking. (Robinson, 1988:81)

Byram & Esarte-Sarries (1991) also emphasise that language learners *become* intercultural speakers over time and through several intercultural encounters. It is not simply a case of learning about other cultures but more a *process* of learning to cope with difference, taking time to reflect about otherness, comparing cultural values and experiences, decentring oneself, adapting and ultimately, growing as a human being:

'The learner's ultimate goal is to achieve capacity for cognitive analysis of a foreign culture, people and its artefacts – whether intellectual or other – and for affective response to the experience of another culture which neither hinders his perception of self or others, nor prevents his adaptation to new environments.

(Byram, Esarte-Sarries, 1991: xiii)

To become an intercultural speaker is to become a person who is aware that different cultures, environments and situations are *unpredictable* and full of pitfalls just as they also hold many new possibilities and discoveries. Synergy or misunderstandings are both parts of the same equation and so the intercultural speaker must learn to be sensitive and flexible enough to deal appropriately with whatever situation arises:

Cultural awareness does not simply imply uncritical acceptance of other's culture. It is not an idealistic, idyllic state of mind. On the contrary, cultural awareness implies an open and critical attitude to one's own culture and the culture of others, without stereotypes.

(Katnic-Bakaršic, 1998:31)

One problem as is that miscommunication is still too focused on linguistic proficiency. This is perhaps because many outcomes of language teaching/learning are still based solely on language proficiency and exam results. As a result, communication in the foreign language classroom 'breaks down' before it can begin, because a student did not know how to form the present perfect correctly, or because of their problems in pronunciation. This is to see the frame without seeing the picture.

In a European Community which requires flexibility and mobility in order to establish economic growth, cooperation and harmonious intercultural relationships, the role of foreign languages through intercultural and plurilingual speakers and mediators is *fundamental*. Democratic citizenship depends more than ever before on the ability of people to *participate actively* in making decisions and *determining the life* of society (Byram & Grundy, 2002), (my italics). The educational value of plurilingual and pluricultural competencies is not simply about functions or skills, but rather an ‘essential component of democratic behaviour’ which leads to the promotion of a wide view of culture and an awareness of the diversity of the societies we live in (Byram & Grundy, 2002:15). Rather than avoiding difference or treating it as a problem or a hurdle, students learn to react positively to images and expressions of difference:

Citizens in a democracy need intercultural skills for living in communities where cultural diversity is the norm. They need critical cultural awareness to understand the world around them and to challenge injustice, complacency, social exclusion and unwarranted discrimination. The construction of a peaceful, democratic and multicultural Europe requires plurilingual citizens.

(Starkey, 2002:29)

In a project entitled ILTE (Intercomprehension in Language Teacher Education) which was co-ordinated by the University of Aveiro and involved several other European universities and institutions in Europe, the definition of *Intercomprehension* is described as ‘the capacity to establish bridges between languages and cultures, as well as curiosity towards new communicative experiences’ (Andrade & Moreira, 2002). The concepts of interculturality and intercomprehension are *integral* to the notion of the intercultural speaker who *actively* creates links and ‘builds bridges’ and has positive attitudes towards language learning, cultural diversity and new experiences:

... for those working in the project, intercomprehension came to be recognised as a central component of plurilingual and intercultural competence by identifying fundamental skills and attitudes in learning and dealing with language ... By valuing the language of each and developing skills for looking for meaning in languages we

don't understand, intercomprehension supports the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity and the development of positive attitudes towards and respect for difference.

(Moreira, 2003:5)

Perhaps these concepts of plurilinguism and intercomprehension seem rather utopian in their aims. Certainly a great deal of enthusiasm, dedication and open-mindedness will be needed as well as hope and optimism that learning foreign languages do not just *have* a future in higher education – they *are* the future, not only in schools, universities and their local communities, but also as part of ‘the international action for respect for human rights’ (Byram & Grundy, 2002:36).

However it is clear that intercomprehension and the development of intercultural skills cannot be achieved in isolation or in the hands of individual language teachers. Collaboration, cooperation and interdisciplinary ‘border-crossing’ in both the classroom and the educational environments as a whole are fundamental:

The ILTE project has revealed how language teachers, who traditionally worked separately and often in competition with each other (for resources, for space, for prestige), can work collaboratively on the development of positive attitudes and representations of others and other languages, on the development of metalinguistic and metacommunicative skills, and exploit the linguistic repertoires of their learners in order to support the development of the single, complex, composite competence that is plurilingualism (Trim, 1997; Council of Europe, 2000; Byram & Grundy, 2002). This collaboration, at a time when resources (finance and time) for language education are increasingly slim, has indicated that it works to the advantage of the different disciplines involved and, more importantly, to the advantage of the learners themselves.

(Moreira, 2002:5)

The concept of the intercultural speaker responds to contemporary theories about cultural identity as something which is socially constructed and always in the process of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ (Hall, 1961:225). Therefore the intercultural speaker also

confirms that teachers and learners of foreign languages are ‘border crossers’ and in a sense also innovators, who negotiate between the universal and particular, and who combine a sense of belonging to a sense of detachment (Giroux, 1992). Habermas talks about identity being continually constructed and deconstructed within ‘the performative *attitude* of participants in interaction’. I have highlighted the word ‘attitude’ here because this is what is at the very core of successful intercultural communication and fostering positive and critical attitudes in the language classroom and beyond (especially at tertiary level), should be a *fundamental* part of any language/culture/citizenship programme.

The diagrams that follow are intended to illustrate the concept of intercultural communicative competence. Table 4, on page 72, outlines the components of intercultural communicative competence which are founded on developing students’ knowledge, competences and attitudes in the foreign language classroom.

Figures 3&4 on pages 73/4, are from Moreira (2003) and they illustrate how intercultural communication is a process of learning to understand otherness and differences through collaboration, exploration and reflection about one’s own cultural practices and experiences. It is about drawing upon our own cultural resources and histories and experiences in order to create a new cultural space and understanding. To be intercultural, one has to engage in new intercultural experiences and be part of an open forum of communication, empathy, openness to new possibilities, discovery and reflection.

Table 4

Steps to Intercultural Communicative Competence.

(based on Byram, 1997; Council of Europe, 1998;2000)

According to Council of Europe documentation, intercultural communicative competence is made up three aspects: *knowledge, competences* and *attitudes*:

➤ **Knowledge:**

- General knowledge about the country (or countries) where the target language is spoken;
- Socio-cultural knowledge about the community (-ies) where the target language is spoken;
- Knowledge , awareness and understanding of differences between one's own and the 'world' of the target community (-ies).

➤ **Competences:**

- ability to establish links between one's own culture and the target culture;
- capacity to recognise and use different strategies to establish contact with people from other cultural communities;
- the capacity to act as a cultural mediator between one culture and another;
- the capacity to effectively handle situations involving miscommunication between one's own culture and target cultures;
- the capacity to adapt to new experiences, other people and other ways of thinking and living.

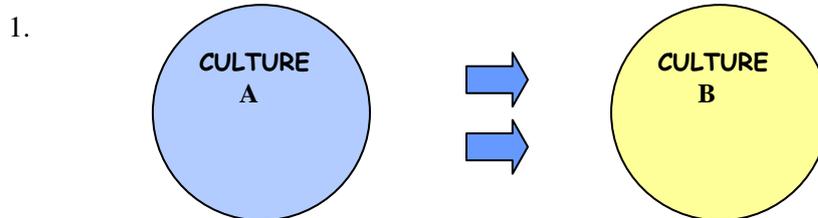
➤ **Attitudes:**

- positive attitudes towards others;
- interest in the ideas and cultural values of others;
- willingness to relativize points of view and systems of cultural values;
- motivation to go out and *discover* new languages, cultures, peoples and experiences.

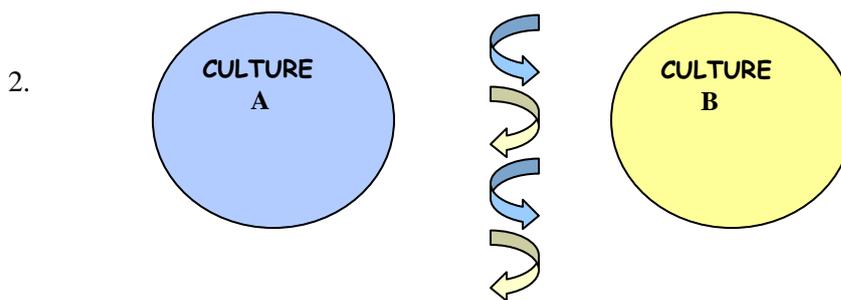
Figure 5

The Intercultural Dimension

(adapted from Moreira, 2003:72/3)



Intercultural communication is based on a conscious effort to understand otherness and difference through the learner applying his own cultural knowledge and experiences to date.



The intercultural dimension is developing as the learner observes his own culture and the culture of the other from the inside and the outside. (Kramsch, 1993). The use of the two colours and the changes in direction of the arrows, show how intercultural communication is a process that is mediated and negotiated through comparison and reflection.

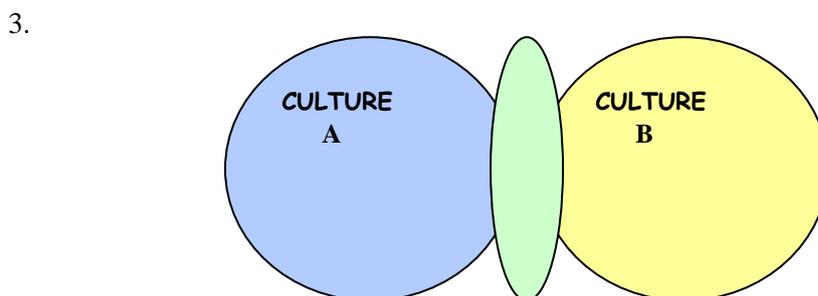


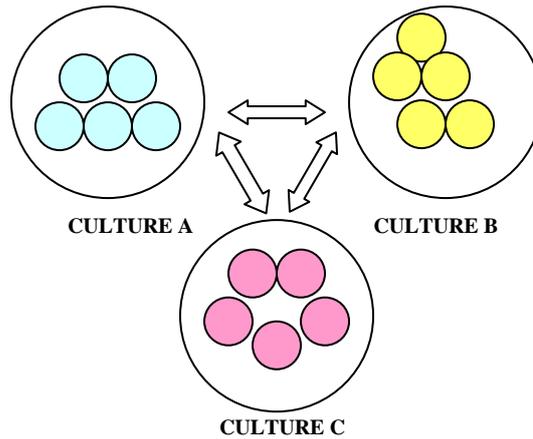
Figure 3 shows the intercultural dimension (cf. Andrade & Moreira, 2002). The colour green illustrates how the two cultures have come together in a successful intercultural encounter and have created a new space through exchange, discovery and understanding.

Figure 6

Plurality of cultures and languages *in action*.

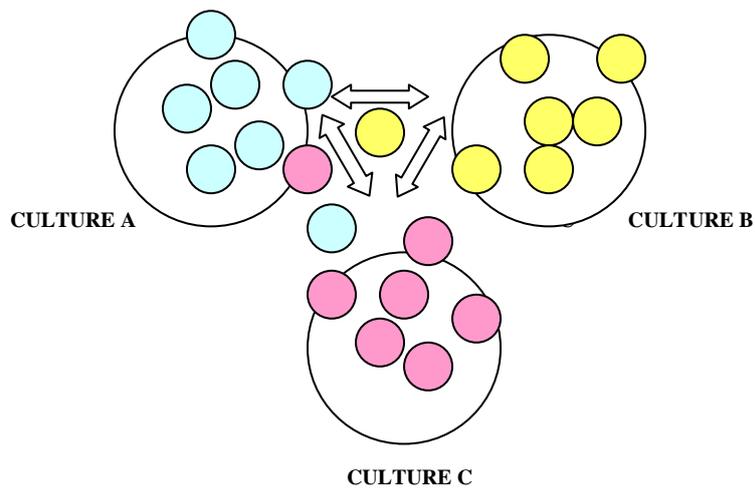
(adapted from Moreira, 2003:72/3)

A



In 6A there is a sense of cultural plurality within each cultural community. However these cultures are closed inside their own cultural worlds and represented identities, so intercultural communication is blocked by stereotypes and preconceived ideas.

B



6B represents plurality and intercultural communication in action. This intercultural encounter is not limited as it is in fig.6A. It is an open, democratic forum of possibilities, exploration, communication and discovery.

2.7 Language Learning for European Citizens: *The Common European Framework*.

In a European White Paper issued in 1995, the European Commission outlined that the aim of language education should be to link identity, citizenship and learning through improving students' 'multilingual language competences':

Multilingualism is part and parcel of both European identity/citizenship and the learning society.

(CEC, 1995:67)

A second key document, *The Common European Framework (CEF)* which was issued a year later and updated in 2001, describes itself as a 'European Framework of Reference for Language Teaching, Learning and Assessment' whose 'general aim is to overcome linguistic barriers' (Council of Europe, 2001:21). In the introduction, the main objectives of the framework are set out as follows:

- *to equip all Europeans for the challenges of intensified international mobility and closer co-operation not only in education, culture and science but also in trade and industry;*
- *to promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective international communication;*
- *to meet the needs of a multilingual and multicultural Europe by appreciably developing the ability of Europeans to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries;*
- *to avert the dangers that might result from the marginalisation of those lacking the skills necessary to communicate in an interactive Europe;*
- *to promote methods of modern language teaching which will strengthen independence of thought, judgement and action combined with social skills and responsibility.*

(Council of Europe, 2001:14)

It is evident that in European societies which are becoming more and more characterised by their differences, that cultural diversity and plurilingualism must be valued and respected. The scope of languages which permeate Europe should also be valued and not lost in the search for some kind of ‘perfect language’ or Esperanto. Culture has to be integrated to ensure that learners who do not have access to ‘the dominant culture in their own or another society’ are ‘valued in any interaction’ (Byram & Grundy, 2002).

Cultural competences are referred to as ‘general competences’, which are presented as the background ‘knowledge, skills and characteristics’ or the ‘life skills’ which the individual is expected to possess. As opposed to *intercultural* competences, the emphasis is rather on the umbrella term of ‘communicative language competences’ which encompass ‘linguistic competences’, ‘sociolinguistic competence’ and ‘pragmatic competences’, as well as ‘language activities’ within an ‘action-orientated approach’. The fact is that the emphasis here is on teaching students ‘functions’ and assessing them on their ‘performance’ and ‘fulfilment of tasks’. Culture is once again blurred into the background as something which is an individual quality rather than an integral part of the knowledge and capacities in the language learning process. Byram calls this a ‘toning down’ of the importance given at the outset of promoting plurality by using the term of ‘general’ competences and by failing to address how intercultural competence may be assessed as a valid part of language evaluation.

The ‘general competences’ are outlined as: (1) ‘declarative knowledge’ (*savoir*); ‘skills and know-how’ (*savoir-faire*); (3) ‘existential competence’ (*savoir-être*); and (4) ‘ability to learn’ (*savoir apprendre*). Within the declarative knowledge (*savoir*), the students are expected to learn about the world and the target societies and compare them with their own. While several specifications are given, there are no strategies or concepts on how these might be implemented, for example: ‘Careful consideration has to be given to the representation of the target culture and the choice of the social group or groups to be focussed on’. What are the roles of the teachers in this? Should they be neutral or engaged? Should they facilitate or participate?

The second ‘general competence’ is *savoir faire* or ‘skills and know-how’. The framework lists the social skills the student might need to interact with people from other cultures but how should ‘appropriacy’ be dealt with? Does the teacher tell the students how to behave? It seems that this would rather curb the qualities of curiosity and discovery and presume that only one way is the ‘right’ way. This would contradict both concepts of plurality and diversity.

While the document notes in detail the need for ‘contact with others’ and suggests the complexity of language/culture learning by stressing that different ‘strategies’ should be used, and while there is a great deal of emphasis on social and cultural diversity, there are lots of questions left open for teachers to ask and find answers to. What is the ‘target’ culture? Whose culture are we focussing on? What is appropriate and why? Where are we standing when we make judgements about culture(s)?

It is clearly in the nature of such ‘global’ documents to be general rather than specific, but one needs to be aware that it is just a ‘framework’ and those who are involved in language-and-culture education have to be responsible for ‘filling-in’ the gaps.

The third ‘general competence’ is ‘existential competence (*savoir être*)’ and it involves a reflection about the ‘attitudes, motivations, values and beliefs’ of individual identities. The language learners are expected to show ‘openness’ towards other cultures and ‘relativise’ their own cultural viewpoints. Guilherme (2002:148) points out that the scope of process and interaction here are ‘restricted’ by the fact that the focus is on the individual and the culture(s) involved are not dynamic but ‘static’, so that by relativising one’s culture, there is a possible danger to one’s ‘ethical and moral integrity’. She goes on to conclude that the philosophical, social and political implications suggested by ‘existential competence’ (*savoir être*) have remained ‘unexplored’.

Despite some of the generalisations within the document, *The Common European Framework* is a valuable project. In a European space whose borders are expanding every year and which now contains 25 different countries (45 in the Council of Europe),

language education has never been as important and as necessary as it is now. It is as significant for the individual citizens who belong to the community of Europe, as it is for societies and communities as a whole. In May 1999, the Council of Europe affirmed its vision of building Europe as:

a freer, more tolerant and just society based on solidarity, common values and a cultural heritage enriched by its diversity.

(Council of Europe, 1999:7)

Languages are a particularly important component of this cultural heritage. The diversity of languages contributes to the richness of Europe's culture and their preservation and development depend on common understandings of citizenship. The Council of Europe describes the responsibilities of citizenship as a lifelong learning experience and a participative process developed in various contexts which:

- *Equips men and women to play an active part in public life and to shape in a responsible way their own destiny and that of society;*
- *Aims to instil a culture of human rights;*
- *Prepares people to live in a multicultural society and to deal with difference knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and morally;*
- *Strengthens social cohesion, mutual understanding and solidarity.*

(Council of Europe, 1999:12)

In terms of education for democratic citizenship, it is the *responsibility of educators* to help young people to become 'better equipped to participate actively in democratic life by assuming and exercising their rights and responsibilities in society' (The Forrester Report, 1999: www.media.corporate). Furthermore, in a recent paper on '*Citizenship, Intercomprehension and Language Education*', Moreira affirms the reality that the language classroom may in fact be 'the only place where otherness is encountered and where positive attitudes in relation to other languages and cultures may be encouraged and the desired cultural pluralism promoted' (Moreira, 2003:5). Seen in light, the development of plurilingualism and intercultural competence and understanding stretches

far beyond European projects and curricula. It is to participate and be a part of an international effort to challenge injustice and complacency, defend human rights and construct a peaceful, democratic and multicultural Europe.

2.8 ‘Lifelong learning’: an Interdisciplinary Approach.

Lifelong learning is about much more than economics. It also promotes the goals and ambitions of European countries to become more inclusive, tolerant and democratic. And it promises a Europe in which citizens have the opportunity and ability to realise their ambitions and to participate in building a better society. Indeed a recent report refers to the growing evidence that learning and investment in human capital is associated not just with GDP, but also with greater civic participation, higher reported well-being and lower criminality.

(CEC, 2001:7)

In the preface to this study, I mentioned the fact that the concept of learning/studying over a lifetime is not one that many people see as a natural part of their lives. Normally learning and studying are associated with school and university and once the required qualifications have been attained, people move on with their lives and their educational cycle has come to an end. How often have you heard someone say, *‘I’m too old for studying. Leave it to someone younger’*? Yet the key to a civilised, flourishing and democratic society lies in education and education needs to be ongoing and include several layers of experience. Looking at some job advertisements, one might imagine that life ends at around thirty, because after that, few companies seem to want to employ anybody. For these values to change, the impetus has to come from the education sector itself and most especially from universities. Higher levels of education and continuous learning, when they are accessible to all and valued by all, also make an important contribution to reducing inequalities and preventing marginalisation – including *ageism*. Referring again to job advertisements, note how almost every company requires not just the skills, knowledge and qualifications to do a job, but also the *experience*. Only I do not know many qualified and skilled professionals with lots of experience who are aged just thirty.

The Memorandum on ‘lifelong learning’ defines lifelong learning as:

all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.

(CEC,2001:9)

In order to achieve a knowledge-based society in its true sense, there needs to be a radical new approach to both training and education. I have made a distinction between the two because I would suggest that ‘training’ involves developing skills and competences and therefore training courses are, by definition, usually short building blocks of knowledge, which are learnt and updated throughout our working lives. Education, on the other hand, is something much more holistic that involves the whole human being and is something that is an ongoing part of *all* our lives. It embraces our personal selves as well as our professional fields of work. Therefore education has to be interdisciplinary and not specialised in one area at the expense of others. This is often what happens to students in the transition from secondary to tertiary education. They go from studying a wide field of different subjects in humanities, sciences and new technologies to study in a specialised area. Even the university is frequently divided into separate blocks, which are supposedly interdependent but, in reality, tend towards separate entities working within their own specialities and interests.

Lifelong learning has been the subject of policy discussion and development for many years. During the 1990s there has been a growing recognition of the importance of educational and linguistic issues. One of the most influential documents was entitled *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (1995)*. It recommended that European citizens be proficient in at least three Community Languages, ‘backed up by the ability to adapt to working and living environments, characterised by different cultures’ (CEC, 1995:48). In order to achieve this goal, the White Paper proposed to start language learning as early as possible and made a commitment to plurilingual and pluricultural competence.

In economic terms, the employability and adaptability of citizens is crucial if Europe is to become the most dynamic and knowledge-based society in the world. Yet competitive advantage does not depend on new technologies and economic trends. Investment in human capital and lifelong learning has a key role to play in creating a skilled, adaptable and qualified workforce. 'Employees will need an ability to operate professionally in a foreign context, a definition which brings together skills, attitudes and employability' (Coleman, 1998:15).

The fact is that people are increasingly required to be mobile and to cross borders, so therefore they will have to be able to adapt to different communities and to be flexible and willing to learn new languages and skills throughout their working lives. Mughan (1998) points out that the globalisation of business has led to working environments that are both 'linguistically and culturally unpredictable'. Byram & Ó Riagáin (1999) remind us that political events throughout Europe 'have created a new purpose in foreign language education' because foreign languages will be used in so many different cultural landscapes.

According to the *European Union Labour Force Survey* (<http://forum.europa.eu.int/employment>) only 8% of European Union 25-64 year olds are participating in education and training. The proportion of 25-64 year olds attaining at least upper secondary level education in 2000 was only 60.3% (Council of Europe (678), 2001:6). This certainly seems a long way off the vision of a knowledge-based European Community of 'lifelong learning'. In this context, there is an increased awareness that the approach to education must be broader and bring training and education together into a *framework* of 'lifelong learning' throughout university, into the workplace and beyond. This means removing the barriers that prevent people from participating in education throughout their lives. It is only when education is accessible and qualifications become standardised that citizens can truly have the opportunities to realise their ambitions and move freely around Europe and between different workplaces in pursuit of learning and self-improvement:

Enabling citizens to combine and build on learning from school, universities, training bodies ... presupposes that all forms of learning can be assessed and identified. A comprehensive new approach to valuing learning is needed to build bridges between different learning contexts and learning forms.

(CEC, 2001:15)

Languages are the key to knowing other people and it is the notion of proficiency in languages which is linked to a sense of being European. In an article on the future of higher education, Charles Clarke states that the future success of Europe ‘depends critically upon our universities and their ability to ‘effectively mobilize the imagination, skills and talents of all our people’ (DES, 2004:1).

The Bologna Declaration (1999) sets out the following criteria for higher education within the framework of lifelong-learning, mobility and European citizenship:

- *Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;*
- *Adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate;*
- *Establishment of a system of credits – such as in the ECTS system- as a proper means of promoting the most widespread student mobility. Credits should also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning;*
- *Promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to effective exercise of free movement with particular attention:*
 - *for students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services;*
 - *for teachers, researchers and administrative staff, recognition of periods spent in a European context researching, teaching and training;*
- *Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and comparable methodologies;*
- *Promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programmes of study, training and research.*

The Bologna Declaration is a vision that makes great demands and suggests radical changes. It undertakes to fully respect the diversity of cultures, languages, national education systems and university autonomy, while bringing these into a ‘European space’ of mobility, exchanging of ideas, intercultural co-operation, mutual respect and valorisation within the wider context of education for democracy and citizenship. Above all, it belongs to a vision that defines language learning as a significant educational experience, whenever or wherever it takes place. Indeed the success and viability of a European community in its true sense of a community of peoples, cultures and languages, can only be achieved if languages are not reduced to skills or marginalized into training courses.

Plurilingualism implies a wide, rather than a narrow educational domain. It is developed through the processes of time, space, experience, exchange and reflection. It is at the *heart* of lifelong-learning and collaborative learning across borders. Instead of specialising in perfecting grammar and a range of discrete linguistic codes, learners should be gaining fluency, competence and confidence in languaging and communicating. At the same time, learners need to develop an awareness of the diversity of languages and cultures that exist around them and of which they are also a part. The ‘model’ for language learners is no longer to be like a ‘native speaker’, but to be an intercultural speaker who can participate actively in the European democracy; not to imitate but to *make a difference*:

It is the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person has proficiency of varying degrees, in several languages, and experiences of several cultures.

(Council of Europe, 2001: 168)

A united Europe based on linguistic and cultural diversity ‘requires that we learn the languages and cultures of others, but as insiders not outsiders’ (Moreira, 1999:285). The key person to fulfil these initiatives is the language teacher, sometimes more appropriately referred to as the language *educator*. An interpretation of the distinction between an educator and a teacher could be that the educator is someone who

collaborates and engages with the learner in a much more holistic sense, both in the classroom and as part of the community outside the classroom. It seems to me that at university level, this should be the reality. Both educators and learners have to confront these new challenges and be adaptable to and prepared for the outside world in its broadest sense, if language learning is not to lose its relevance.

University education must not be allowed to be turned into training modules. Education which promotes lifelong learning *enables* learners to become involved in educational values and engages their interests and their personalities. Education and lifelong learning are at the heart of international cooperation and founded on moral values, human rights and the promotion of democracy and active citizenship.

3 Research Background and Methodology

3.0 Context of Study

This study began eighteen months ago in the Department of Languages and Cultures at the University of Aveiro in Portugal. Having taught in the department now for five years, it seemed time to step back and reflect on both my teaching and on the learning process of my students, their motivations to learn foreign languages-and-cultures, their experiences of studying at university and their aspirations and thoughts about the future. Lots of research is being carried out in the Council of Europe and in educational institutions through the European Community, on the implementation of foreign languages in primary schools and on foreign language courses, teacher training and curricula in schools. How can students in secondary education be motivated to learn different languages? How can culture become an *integral* part of language programmes and how can teachers of foreign languages-and-cultures define cultures and approach them in a critical and meaningful way? But what of foreign language study at university?

It seems to me that there is always a great deal of attention directed towards schools because secondary education is compulsory and everyone has to attend secondary schools and follow similar national curricula and exam systems. In a recent election manifesto, Tony Blair spoke of education as his *passion* and improving secondary schools as a *priority* for the future of Britain and Europe.

University is totally different. It is a much smaller educational environment. It is not obligatory. Only the best scholars get places. Learners choose what they want to study and often where and how they will study. Therefore the general idea suggests that universities will somehow take care of themselves. Academics will do their research and the students will become independent, take responsibility for their own studies and then move rather effortlessly into their professional roles in society. The perception of a university education is that it will serve the economic needs of society by providing it

with a qualified workforce. This presumes that the intercultural and existential aspects of education and citizenship discussed earlier have no significance in the world of business, or perhaps that they might somehow develop automatically. In this study, my aim was to begin at grass roots level with the students themselves to try to find out the reality of the situation.

There are forty students taking part in the study. They are all fourth year students studying English/German and Portuguese/English and they are all training to become language teachers. This fourth year is a particularly intense time for them because it is their final year before they begin a year of teaching practice. They have a lot of assignments to complete, especially in didactics and pedagogy, and most of them are anxious about making the transition from being students in the classroom to becoming teachers and standing in front of a classroom. In addition to these anxieties, the students are facing large-scale unemployment when they finish, because there are practically no places for secondary school teachers in Portugal at the moment. It seems that the teaching profession is at an all time low. The students seem to be struggling to maintain their self-esteem and confidence in an economic climate that seems to favour temporary opportunities rather than long-term investment and a sense of vocation. It does not seem to matter either, if one is talking in a café in Aveiro, London or Munich. Everybody seems to be wary about the lack of security in their workplaces, uncertainty about the future and the fact that they feel volatile and do not need justification to be replaced. It seems to me that there is both a need and a responsibility to address these social trends and to fight against the forces that would undermine the university as a public sphere and an integral part of local and European communities.

The reason I have chosen to focus my research on a relatively small group, is that I wanted to study my own students and those people I know best. Since I began working as an English teacher at Aveiro University five years ago, I have always taught language students in their final year. It is a role that is both challenging and rewarding because of a desire to help students to achieve their best and to try and make them feel valued, particularly in the precarious climate they find themselves in. This study has provided an opportunity to step back and ask language learners for their opinions about their

education and what it is like to be a language student at university in Portugal. What are students' motivations to study languages and what are their backgrounds and social worlds like? How does studying languages at university compare with experiences at school? What is understood about the concepts of intercultural communicative competences, human rights, European democracy and citizenship? What are students' hopes for the future and how do they perceive their roles in that future?

3.2 Research Questions

The general aims of this study can be consolidated into the following research questions:

1. What is intercultural communication and intercultural communicative competence and how might university students acquire this competence?
2. To what extent are language students at university aware of and/or interested in the cultural dimension of language learning?
3. How do language students at university perceive their own culture and relate this knowledge to other cultures in their language learning?
4. To what extent are university language students being prepared to be critical citizens of Europe?
5. What are the gaps in language students' intercultural communicative competence and how might these gaps be filled by universities the future?

3.3 Methodology and procedures

The focused nature of this study required data and viewpoints collected through a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data resulted from the responses of the students to predetermined alternatives presented in a questionnaire about culture learning in the foreign language classroom (Appendix 2, pp. 175). The criteria for this questionnaire were based on a review of the literature in this field and my own experiences as a teacher and teacher-trainer of languages-and-cultures. The quantitative data were then expanded and explored through student biographies (Appendix 1, pp.169-74) as well as through accounts of their experiences and attitudes towards their time spent in the target culture(s) through Erasmus (Appendix 3 pp.176-79). Finally the participants' views were expressed and clarified in a more spontaneous and personal way through follow-up interviews in focus groups (Appendix 4, pp.180). In this way, the quantitative data based on the predetermined alternatives in the questionnaire, were confronted with the students' 'flow of ideas in the focus group interview' (Alasuutari, 1995).

I considered the focus group interviews as being particularly important within the design and rationale of the study because it provided an opportunity for the participants to express their ideas in an open and informal forum and to exchange their views with one another at the same time. It also allowed for the expansion, discussion and clarification of topics and issues raised by the questionnaire through the *direct* interaction of the participants in a *focussed discussion* (Morgan, 1998). The student biographies and guided questions about their Erasmus experiences provided complementary sources of information about the students as individuals which increased the 'breadth and depth' of the research outcomes (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

Most of the literature in the field of focus-group discussions highlights the potential of such discussions of 'providing a wider range of information, insight, and ideas than will the accumulation of the responses of a number of individuals'. Another important factor is that 'a comment made by one individual often triggers a chain of responses from the other participants' (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990:19). The focus-group interviews were

analysed both vertically, within each group, and horizontally across groups. I would add that knowing the students well and working together with them on an almost daily basis in their language-and-culture learning was also a significant advantage because it made these discussions and exchanges more natural and purposeful. It is not like talking to people whom we do not know. The relationship and shared interests in many areas had already been established.

The conversational mood generated within these interviews and the openness and enthusiasm which was generated by a group of people in the same field and sharing many of the same ambitions and visions about the value of learning languages is reflected in many of the interesting and encouraging insights they produced:

The reason why group discussions provide valuable information is that the situation encourages the people involved to talk about things that would otherwise remain outside the conversation because they are so self-evident. Where people talk about things that they normally do not talk about, we are bound to obtain interesting material.

(Alasuutari, 1995:94)

This study involved three types of triangulation often used in research, namely, ‘combined level of interaction’ due to the ‘individual level’ adopted for the questionnaires and the ‘interactive level’ applied in the focus group interviews and ‘space triangulation’ through the time span of the study. There is also ‘methodological triangulation’ through quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis (Cohen & Manion, 1994:236). There is always a concern with consistency when trying to measure attitudes and compare results across different methods of analysis. Sometimes different responses may have been elicited depending on the variables of wording, context or emphasis (Oppenheim, 1992:147). The analysis of the results was therefore made separately and over a period of time during which findings and consistency were monitored and compared across the different areas of data collection and methodologies.

4 Students' Voices: Learning Foreign Languages-and-Cultures at University.

4.1 Profile of University Students Studying Foreign Languages.

Teaching and learning is not just about methods, techniques and outcomes. It is all about people and where they come from, how they live, what their social and private worlds are like and the diversity of experience, knowledge and personalities they each bring with them into the classroom. It seemed fitting, therefore, to begin a study about language students with the students themselves.

The first questionnaire the students were given was in the form of a student biography, Appendix 1, (pp.169-74). It is a fairly long questionnaire divided into three sections and in order to give the students time and privacy to reflect about and answer the questions, they were asked to complete it at home in their own time. It can be referred to as an ethnographical study, because it is a methodology for finding out 'knowledge that others already have' – in this case the knowledge that the students bring with them into the language classroom. It is an attempt to begin to learn the 'meanings and patterns of a way of life' and a means of building up an understanding of the 'meanings, patterns and fluxes of *real* life' (Hymes, 1980:98), (my emphasis).

The first section of the questionnaire is entitled '*Your background*'. The questions in this part of the questionnaire are all about establishing who the students are:

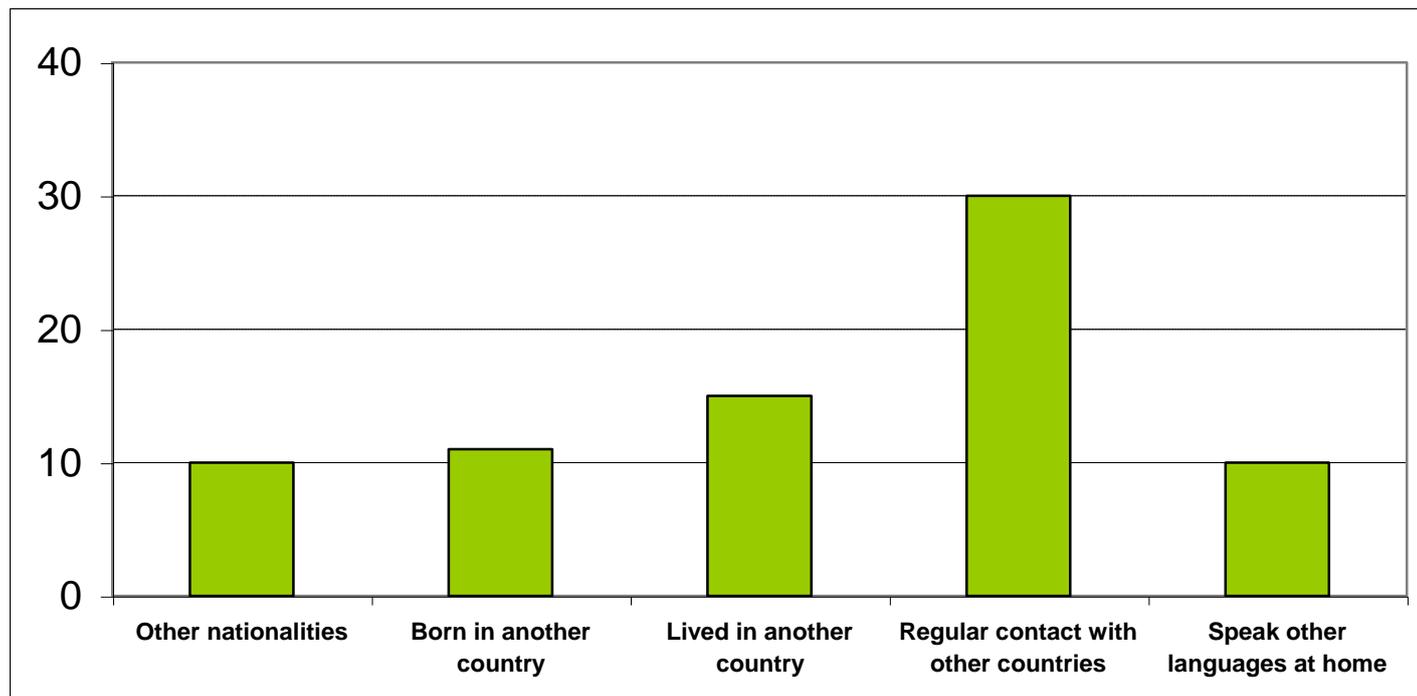
- *What is your nationality?*
- *Have you been brought up in Portugal?*
- *Have you ever lived in another country?*
- *Do you have regular contact with friends and relatives living in other countries?*
- *What languages do you speak at home?*

Unlike schools, whose intake of young people is usually from the local community, universities take in students from all over the country and indeed from other countries, too. The language department, particularly, is a community which is always buzzing with life and humming with languages from all over the world. Most of the language teachers are themselves natives of their own language communities and then there is always a large community of Erasmus students in the department. This makes universities unique and dynamic, as a whole melange of students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds converge. Students come and go within a short time span and so this makes the university a kind of 'border zone' (Rosaldo, 1989) – a community full of diversity and life that is 'always in motion and not frozen for inspection'.

The university is a truly intercultural space but this is often overlooked because *on the surface* the students seem to be a homogenous group – Portuguese students who are studying foreign languages. The responses in the questionnaire paint a completely different picture. In figure 7, on page 92, it emerges that the forty people in my two classes of Portuguese/English and English/German students are anything but a homogenous group.

Figure 7

Cultural and Linguistic Plurality in the Foreign Language Classroom at Aveiro University.



It is evident from this data that students are much more likely to encounter diversity and difference in the language classroom than sameness and homogeneity. Of the forty students in the survey, a quarter of them do not have Portuguese nationality and almost a third of them were born in other countries in Europe and beyond. It is assumed that when a group of people communicate in the same language, they come from the same place and have the same roots. Yet this rather ignorant attitude means that the great potential to begin exploring cultures and identities, and developing intercultural competences and awareness in the classroom is lost. Jordan (1998) asserts that students must develop awareness and capabilities in their own cultures before they begin to develop cross-cultural capabilities. Likewise, Byram & Ó Riagáin (1999) remind us that there is a 'new role' in language education to make the international dimension of citizenship even at national level, much more evident. Learning to live with others in this broader context must begin with the way we behave and interact with others on a daily and local level.

On the same topic of nationality and beginning with one's own culture and language before learning another one, the results of this first part of the questionnaire reflect the reality that Portugal is a country of immigrants, or better said 'reverse emigrants' (Maxwell, 1995). This fact is important because in some areas the emigrant population is in the majority, but also because most of these emigrants maintain links with their homeland '*terras*' and with friends and family in the countries they lived in. Hence it can be said that the emigrant population has often had a great influence in changing the face of Portugal and in introducing a multicultural dimension to the small villages that people were born in. It is also true that many Portuguese people who have not emigrated or lived and worked in other countries feel a sense of resentment towards the 'immigrants', as they choose to call them. Returning to our classroom, 75% of the students said that they had *regular* contact with relatives and friends living in other countries, particularly in France (a million Portuguese people live in Paris alone), Switzerland and Luxembourg. Almost 40% of the students have lived in another country for more than six months and 25% speak another language at home as well as Portuguese. These figures are significant and useful because teaching and learning foreign languages is not something which can ever be undertaken according to universal

norms and general truths, because people and the worlds they live in do not conform to such uniformity – thankfully.

It can therefore be concluded from this initial insight into a university classroom, that teachers/students must begin with the local before they move to the international and learn about themselves and before they study the other. Intercultural awareness begins *right here*. Our own beliefs, values and behaviours are deeply embedded within who we are. I have become acutely aware of this because of my own experiences of living in different countries and among other cultures. As language-and-culture teachers, we are responsible for developing our students' self-awareness' and their awareness of others' beliefs and cultures. Byram emphasises the importance of students becoming aware of their own values and how these *influence* the way they view other people's values.

Based on the diversity encountered in my language classes, I gave the students the task of being ethnographers. Based on the five questions outlined above, the students were asked to go round the class and find out about the background of their colleagues. Interestingly, apart from the small groups of people that students went around in, they realised that they did not know many people in their class at all, even though the class is small (14 students) compared with many classes at university. It was a very fruitful exercise in that it made the students realise how diverse their group actually was. Here is what one of them commented at the end of the class:

I am totally amazed. I spoke to people in the class that I see almost every day but I had no idea about them. I learnt so much about different cultures and attitudes as well as the values of people in the class who have lived in other countries. It has made me think twice about calling someone an immigrant.

4.2 Motivations to Learn a Foreign Language at University.

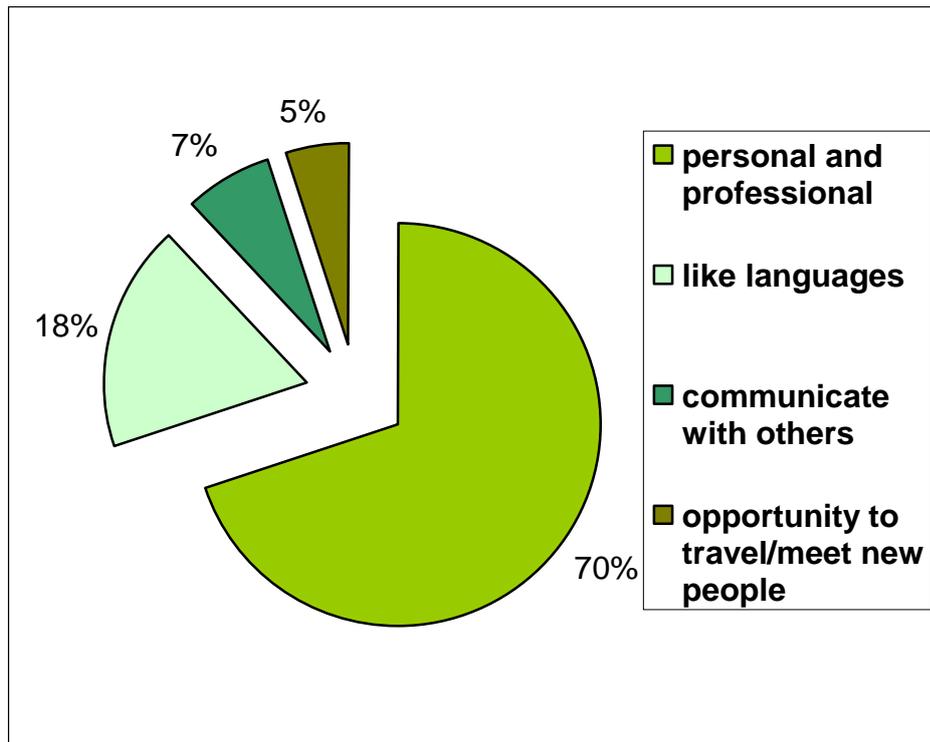
The second part of the student biographies focuses on the students' motivations to learn a foreign language at university. It will also serve to make some interesting comparisons with the data in chapter 4.3, when students are asked to think about language-and-culture as an integrated concept. It is relevant to recap at this stage that the participants in this survey are all in the final year of their course to become foreign language teachers. Due to the current climate in Portugal of high unemployment among language teachers, the chances of these students getting a job in teaching in the near future are slim. I must admit that I was expecting a degree of despondency in their answers. I imagined that after having studied English and German/Portuguese for four years at university and up to twelve years (in the case of English) throughout their lives, their morale would be really low and their attitudes towards language learning would reflect this feeling that the 'promise' of learning languages as a key to new opportunities had not been fulfilled. Quite the opposite was true and not one of the participants said anything negative about languages, nor did they mention any sense of regret or disillusionment at having chosen to study languages. The students' motivations to learn foreign languages fell into the following four categories:

- 1) *Both personal and professional reasons to become a teacher - (note that the vast majority of students placed personal reasons before professional ones).*
- 2) *A liking/love of languages (in general terms).*
- 3) *Languages enable them to communicate with others.*
- 4) *Languages provide opportunities to travel and meet new people.*

Figure 8, on page 97, shows the frequencies of these responses in percentages.

Figure 8

University Students' Motivations to Learn Foreign Languages.



The most salient aspect of the students' answers was the fact that *none* of them talked about a desire to speak a language perfectly, or a need to improve their grammatical knowledge or linguistic proficiency. None of them perceived languages within their classroom context or within a framework of assessment or evaluation criteria. None of them said that they wanted to improve their pronunciation or fluency. This is interesting and fruitful from the point of view of this study, because the nature of the questionnaire relates to them as people through the biography format, rather than as students in a classroom.

Seventy percent of the students stated that their motivation to learn languages began as personal or integral motivation: understanding English TV or song lyrics, wanting to communicate with family outside Portugal, communicating with others, love of languages or simply having been inspired by a teacher at school. These personal reasons later developed a professional strand through their ambition to become teachers and share their enthusiasm for languages with others.

Twelve percent simply stated that they had chosen to study languages because they liked and even *loved* languages. A further ten percent said that learning languages was important to them so that they could communicate with others. For the final eight percent of the students, their motivation to learn languages was that they felt it would give them the opportunity to travel and meet new people, as well as to get to know different cultures.

Having established the students' motivations to learn foreign languages at university, they were interviewed about their choices so that they could elaborate on what they had written in the questionnaire. We worked in small groups and the discussions that ensued were both informal and personal because they took place outside the classroom and the students were keen to express their opinions, both with me and with one another. As communication is a very spontaneous and dynamic act of exchanging ideas, turn taking and expressing personal feelings, these discussions were recorded and my role was very much a background one of eliciting ideas and facilitating the dialogues, but only intervening where necessary.

What follows in tables 5a and 5b, on pages 100 and 101, is a collection of the ideas and opinions which the students expressed during these discussions about their reasons and motivations for wanting to study foreign languages at university.

Table 5a

What the Students said: *Our Motivations to Learn Foreign Languages at University.*

Firstly I wanted to learn languages to become a teacher, but the more languages I learn the more I realise that it provides me with the skills and the confidence to do lots of jobs.

Every language is a secret tool that you can use anywhere.

I want to improve myself culturally.

I grew up speaking two languages and it made me want to learn more.

I have always loved languages and I think that they will give me opportunities in life to do something important, though I don't know what right now.

Having moved to Portugal from Australia, I didn't want to lose my mother tongue or forget my culture.

"You can't evolve if you only know one language. Everybody at university should learn at least one language."

It gives me a wider view of world cultures and helps me to tolerate the differences and the gaps between people from different cultures.

I want to learn as many different languages as possible during my life.

Languages are good for me.

It is important to learn how to express our point of view.

I can't feel European if I don't learn other languages. Learning English just isn't enough.

Table 5b

If you don't learn other languages, you are limited.

I just can't imagine living in the world we have today, without being able to speak foreign languages. After all, it's not an exotic thing like it used to be. We talk to foreigners every day.

We live in a global world but languages and cultures will never be globalized, so we need to treasure our languages.

I don't think we should restrict our learning to only one language. The more languages you learn, the easier it becomes to approach others and communicate with them.

Learning languages broadens our perspectives and that's always a good thing.

I just love to communicate. Talking to others and learning about what they think is living.

It might sound strange but learning languages makes me a better person. I have definitely become more tolerant.

Learning languages makes you more informed about the world. It also makes you want to travel and see that world for yourself.

Learning another language stops us from being narrow-minded and makes us think about the way we live and why we do things in a certain way. The more languages one learns, the more open-minded one becomes towards cultural diversity

Learning two different foreign languages gave me access to other cultures and my own life took on a completely new dimension.

Through this focused discussion outside the formality which is often imposed within the classroom, the students were able to express a whole range of attitudes. These were both encouraging in themselves, because of the positive ideas and viewpoints that the students expressed, and also motivating in terms of the concepts of intercultural communicative competence and language learning *per se*. In a current climate where we are frequently defined in terms of consumers and university students in terms of academic grades and compatibility with the job market, the responses of the students were refreshingly human and encouragingly positive and constructive. The reason for giving so many of the students' responses is that these are the voices of the future and of the people who will carry language learning and enthusiasm for linguistic and cultural diversity into that future. The diversity of responses also reflects the students' general lack of interest in market-based reasons to learn languages. They are motivated to communicate with others, broaden their horizons and learn a plurality of languages and the cultures that bring these languages to life.

Far from being despondent with the current economic situation, there are patterns in the students' voices which value languages as being important *in their own right* because they distinguish us as human beings and at the same time, they forge the links which bring us together as diverse and interesting communities, rather than dull and imaginary 'global villages'. As one student said, 'we will never be globalized, so we need to treasure our languages and cultures'. This is a recognition of the intercultural dimension and importance of valuing one's own language and culture, which evolves during the process of learning new languages and cultures. It is not just about the language itself, but all about broadening one's horizons and perspectives, as well as opening doors into new worlds and new possibilities. This notion of the bigger picture shines through the students' responses. It is reminiscent of the United Nations' slogan to value languages and cultures as *The Treasure Within* (1996). It is recognising language learning as something which distinguishes people as they struggle for life's expression, for resistance, for domination, for beauty and well-being (Bartlett, 2001). Languages open doors to otherness and to quote the students again, they add new dimensions to our lives. They make us more tolerant, they enable us to listen to different voices, they give

us voices to express ourselves and to participate and they encourage us to be open to other perspectives. Most of all, they make us into *'better people'*, not through the *attributes* of power, wealth, class or social position, but rather through the *qualities* of tolerance, openness to others and otherness, mutual respect, understanding and humanity.

To conclude this part of the students' biographies, it has clearly emerged that learning languages for these university students is a lot more than accumulating skills, passing exams and getting marks to gain access to an economic marketplace. Their choices to study languages are principally very personal ones, which have been developing over a long period of time before they ever got to university. Secondly, their motivations to learn foreign languages and cultures are not extrinsic and market-based, but intrinsic and notably very personal ambitions to communicate with other people, to learn more about other cultures and gain insights into other visions of the world. Last, but certainly not least, it is a desire to develop personal capacities of tolerance, open-mindedness, interest and engagement with other peoples and cultures, which they hope will lead them to becoming better people within their own worlds and participating citizens of the wider world to which they also belong and clearly feel a part of:

Different languages will provide different bases for different kinds of experience. Some (particularly the major languages of national and international communication, including English) will provide a basis for action in the world, as well as for learning and conceptualising.

(Brumfit, 1980:99)

4.3 The Role of Culture in Learning a Foreign Language.

The role of the language teacher is therefore to develop skills, attitudes and awareness of values just as much as to develop knowledge of a particular culture or country.

(Byram & Grundy, 2002 :9)

The intercultural dimension of language teaching is certainly a crucial component of foreign language education, both in terms of developing a critical pedagogy in the classroom, as well as in preparing students to become critical citizens in a world of increasing linguistic and cultural diversity. This part of the study is an investigation into the students' views about and attitudes towards culture as part of their language learning. Do they see culture as an integral and necessary component of their language courses? Or is culture still regarded as a kind of backdrop to learning grammar and acquiring linguistic proficiency in the foreign language?

The answers to these questions were sought by means of both the student biographies, Appendix 1, (pp.169-74) and a separate questionnaire specifically about studying culture in foreign language courses at university, Appendix 2, (pp.175). The purpose of using both questionnaires was to find out about the students' views on culture so as to try and identify if their personal perspectives on the role of culture were in any way different when they were asked about culture in a general way (the student biography), or within the specific classroom context of learning language-and-culture (the culture questionnaire).

Considering the complexity of what culture might be and might mean to people and thinking back to Pederson's quote earlier in this study that 'culture is the thousand people sitting in your seat', it seems useful at this point to review some of the uses, contexts and definitions of culture (table 6, page 105).

Table 6

Definitions of culture

(Gupta, in Alred, Byram & Fleming, 2003: 157)

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| ❖ <i>Descriptive</i> | definitions are comprehensive lists of all aspects of human life and activity thought to be examples of culture. |
| ❖ <i>Historical</i> | definitions emphasise the importance of tradition and heritage. |
| ❖ <i>Normative</i> | definitions emphasise the shared rules governing the activity of a group of people. |
| ❖ <i>Psychological</i> | definitions focus on specific features such as learning, problem-solving, assimilation etc. |
| ❖ <i>Structural</i> | definitions are concerned with the pattern or organisation of culture. |
| ❖ <i>Genetic</i> | definitions look at the origins or genesis of culture. |

Despite the range of definitions about culture, it is true to say that there are some aspects of culture which we all share and which are transmitted within each generation and throughout the history of generations. Cultures are collective phenomena that exist above and beyond individuals. While individuals might belong to a particular culture and share some things in common, no individual possesses all the culture of a particular group. Therefore culture is both explicit in some features and implicit in others. Some features can be observed, while others can only be inferred. This is another reason for choosing to investigate attitudes towards culture through both personal and general questionnaires and then to try to probe some of the more hidden dimensions through focussed discussion.

The cultural part of the student biographies is entitled, '*Culture and Understanding Others*' and the main questions asked are as follows:

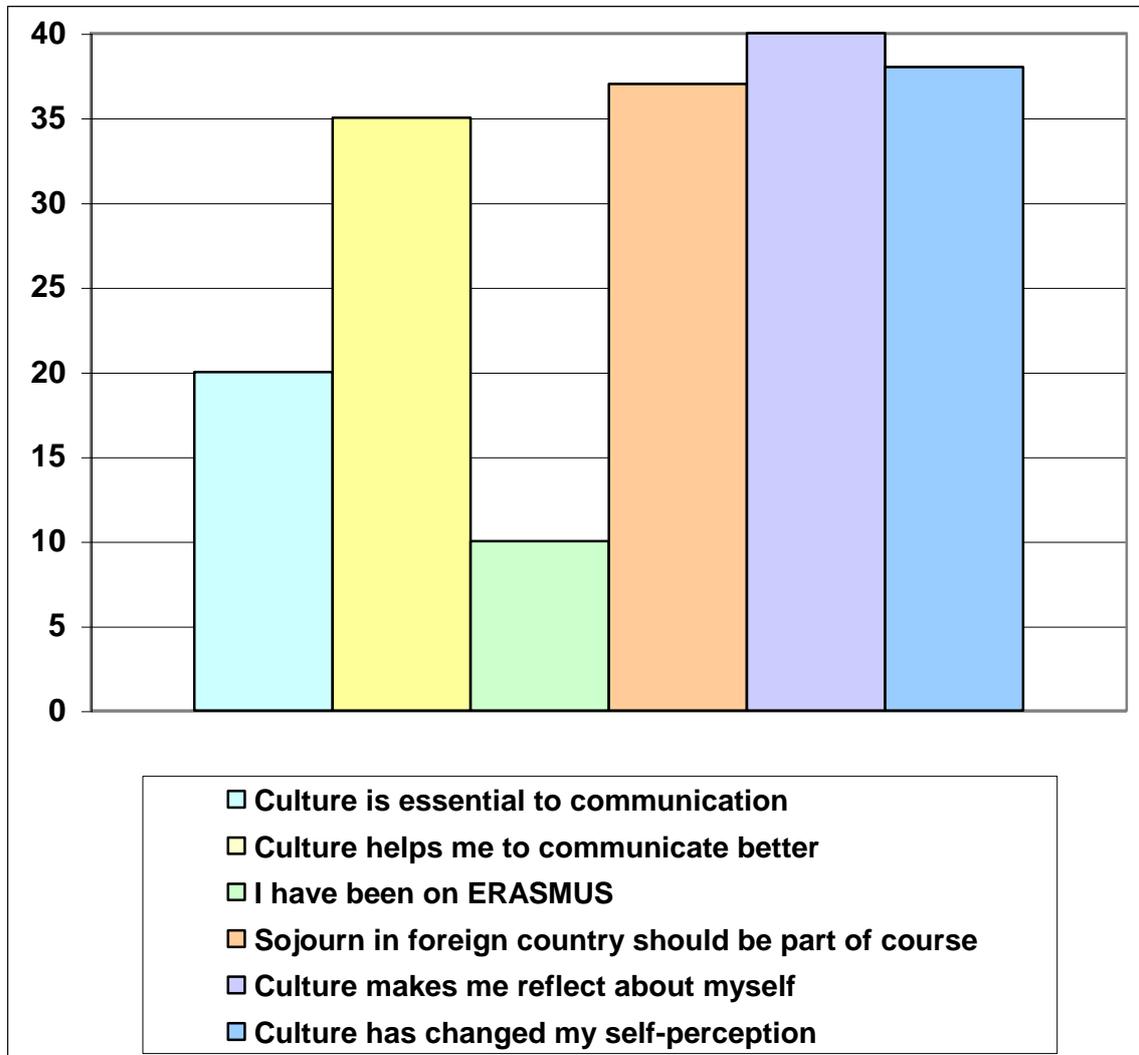
1. *On a scale of 1 (essential) to 5 (irrelevant), what importance do you give to the role of culture in communication?*
2. *Does knowing something about the culture of the language you are learning help you to communicate more effectively?*
3. *Have you been on an Erasmus exchange?*
4. *Should such an experience spending time in the country of the language(s) you are studying be an integral part of your language course at university?*
5. *Does learning about other cultures make you reflect about yourself?*
6. *Has the way you perceive yourself changed in any way since you began studying language-and-culture at university?*

The responses to these questions are represented graphically in figure 9 on page 107.

The students' answers will then be expanded in the discussion of questions that follow.

Figure 9

The Role of Culture in Understanding Others



The results elicited through the student biographies are encouragingly positive. While the students were rather uncertain about the role of culture in communication in the first question, with just half of them believing culture to be an ‘essential’ element in communicating with others, by the time they had been required to reflect more specifically about culture, their responses became much more subjective and coherent in the value they placed upon the cultural dimension of language learning. Perhaps this implicitly reinforces the view that cultural understanding and sensitivity require processes of both reflection and evaluation.

Almost all the students believed that knowing something about the culture of the language they were studying, helped them to develop positive attitudes towards that country. Most students also felt that knowledge of the target culture was *integral* in being able to communicate with members of that culture. One of the English/German students expressed the intrinsic value of culture in communication very aptly:

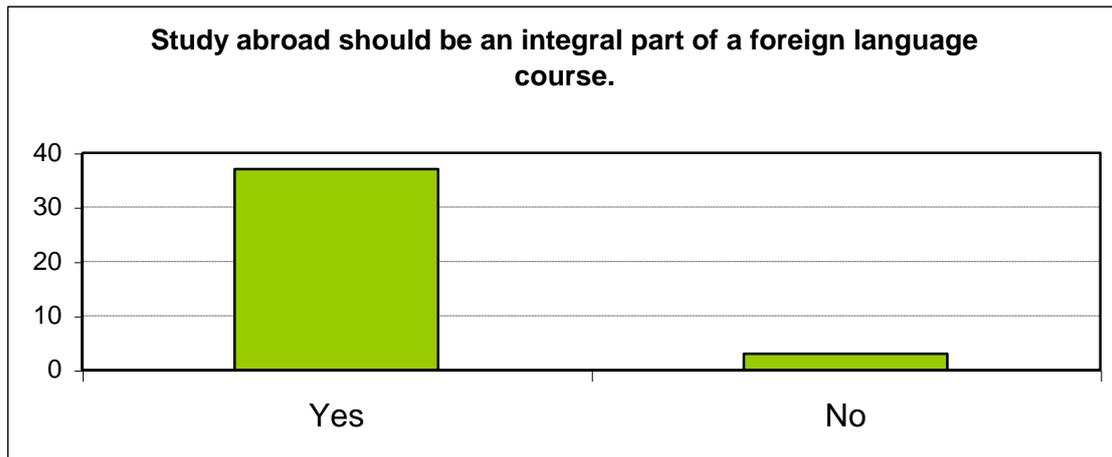
I just cannot imagine learning a language without understanding something of the history and culture of that people. Without culture, languages would be empty. They would lose their human side and their social and cultural ties. The words would be meaningless – language learning would be meaningless.

Similar ideas were expressed by almost all the students both in the questionnaire and later in the focus groups. A selection of their most frequent responses and ideas is reflected in the students’ voices on page 113.

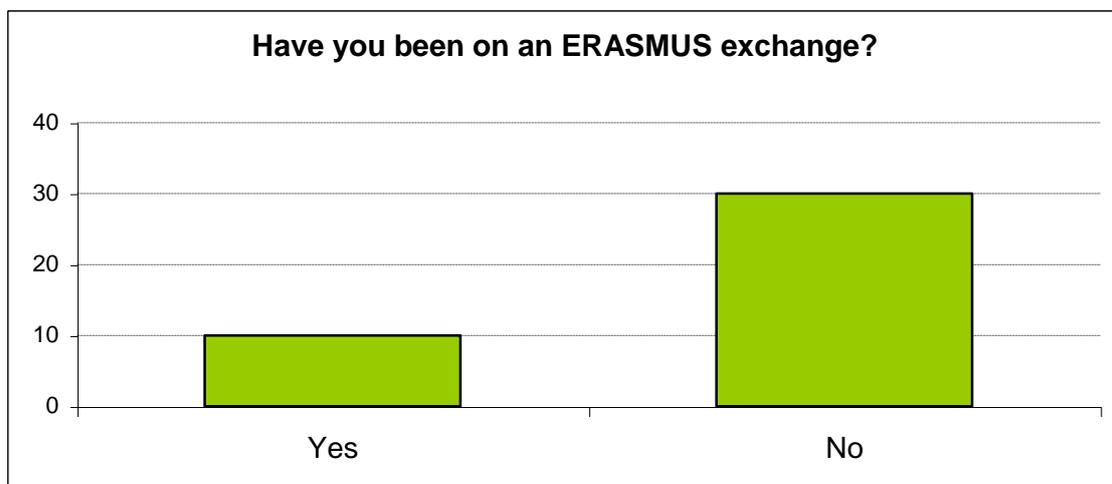
So how many of the forty students took up the opportunity to go on ERASMUS? In figure 10, on page 109, it is telling to observe how many students said that spending time in the target culture(s) of the languages they were studying should be an *integral* part of their courses and how few of them actually went away.

Figure 10

The Importance of Spending Time in the Foreign Culture: *Students' views and the reality of the situation.*



Thirty-eight out of the forty students said that period of time spent studying in the country/-ies of the language(s) they were studying should be an *integral* part of their foreign language courses.



However only ten students went on ERASMUS.

In Portuguese universities it is not obligatory in language courses to spend a so-called year abroad, studying at a foreign university or working as a language assistant in a school. However the students do have the opportunity to go on *Erasmus*. The *Erasmus* programme was established in 1987 as part of a European Union education initiative in higher education to give students the possibility of spending six months to a year studying at another university in Europe and to encourage students to experience other languages and cultures. The *Erasmus* programme is named after the philosopher and humanist *Erasmus of Rotterdam* whose life was marked by the quest for ‘knowledge, experience and insights’, which he believed that only contact with other countries could bring. Yet only ten out of the forty students had taken up this opportunity, even though *all* of them wrote that spending time in the target country was invaluable in helping them to become more fluent in the language and in understanding the culture. One student wrote:

Communication requires understanding, and understanding requires that we step into the shoes of the other culture. We can only really do that by going there and living with those people.

Generally speaking, and certainly in the case of this group of students, it is often the best students who choose to go and study in foreign universities through the *Erasmus* project. The next chapter will focus on these students and their motivations for choosing to take up this opportunity as part of their language-learning programme. However what of the 75% of students who do not go on an *Erasmus* exchange? When asked for reasons why they had not gone to study in their target cultures, 40% said that they felt they were unable to imagine being away from their families and friends for such a long time. A further 35% talked of the high costs of *Erasmus*, but when asked to expand on what these might be, their answers were rather vague and unsubstantiated. The final 25% seemed rather cagey in talking about *Erasmus* expressing a sense that they felt that they had not been given any support or encouragement to go and hence felt

‘unprepared’. This is an interesting aspect which will be discussed in the conclusions of this study.

However, interestingly enough, when we consider the above reasons for *not* spending time in the foreign culture(s), 98% of the students thought that spending time in the foreign culture should be an *integral part of their university education*. The disparity between these figures suggests that the university and also language educators must play a *key role* both in preparing students for such exchanges and in making them an integral and valued part of foreign language education:

I would argue that the teacher has the responsibility to plan deliberately and not merely ‘facilitate’.

(Barnett, 1994:142)

This issue will be addressed in more detail in chapter 4.4 and discussed in the conclusions.

Does learning foreign languages help you reflect about yourself? The answer to this question was a rather unexpected but resounding ‘yes’. All the students had recognised that through learning about other languages-and-cultures, they had advertently or inadvertently become more aware of their own language and culture. Some of the students were very lucid in expressing that through encountering other cultural worlds, they had become much more aware of the qualities and also deficiencies of their own cultures:

When we compare our cultures with others, we see differences and also get to know our weaknesses. But we also see our potential and worth which makes us value them more.

On another level, discovering another culture had led them to discover things about themselves and realise that there are striking differences between cultures, even within a relatively small European space. Reassuringly, however, there were also many strands which were shared and which bind people together as human beings:

Being in contact with other cultures is one of the most wonderful things we can experience and live. We grow as human beings and we learn to share and be more tolerant.

Discovering other cultures is, as Phipps asserts, a process of negotiation and experimentation through which we try to *shape* new meanings and fit them into what we already know. It is to learn ‘by seeing ourselves in different mirrors, at different angles’ and by ‘engaging with others to see what works’ (Phipps & Gonzalez, 2004:74). It is clear from the ways in which the students express themselves, that they are engaged in their learning and that they are reflecting about themselves and seeing themselves in ‘different mirrors’ through culture. These views are documented in table 7, page 113.

Table 7

Now I understand better that my culture defines me, and each culture defines the people who belong to that culture.

Culture makes me think about why people might accept or reject something.

Culture, more than language, makes me feel part of a European whole.

I have learned to see the world in a critical way and I now think about why things are the way they are, or not.

Learning about other cultures has really broadened my horizons and made me want to travel and want to learn more.

Studying culture is becoming more and more important - even essential. You feel that we live in a world full of inequalities and it is becoming so necessary to stop and communicate with others.

We need to study culture and to experience culture to really understand it.

I have realised that the world and the people in it are not as similar or as familiar as I had thought.

You simply cannot isolate language from culture and contexts. It makes no sense.

Culture has made me realise how much everything is linked and how I am part of lots of different cultures, not just my own.

It is certainly not the purpose of teaching to try to change learners' values, nor is it to impose a set of values upon them. Instead it should be to make students *aware* of their own values and behaviours, which are often 'embedded and can create reaction and rejection from others' (Byram & Grundy, 2002: 9). In the light of this reality, the students were asked if their own perceptions of themselves had changed during their language-and-culture learning at university. Thirty-nine out of the forty students felt that it had, because thinking about other cultures and comparing those cultures to their own lifestyles had made them reflect critically about themselves. One student emphasised this as follows:

I believe that you can only be critical about yourself and your culture when you know different cultures and ways of life.

Another student affirmed this view in the following statement:

I have realised how narrow-minded we are in Portugal. Everyone should become more aware of other cultures and meanings.

However thinking about other cultures and drawing comparisons between one's own culture and other cultures does not just assume a critical stance or result in a negative evaluation of the self. It also means that we learn to recognise, value and appreciate aspects of our own culture, that were perhaps rather insignificant or invisible to us before:

I can see that my culture has influences on other cultures and vice-versa. It has really made me appreciate many things that I did not ever think about before.

Another student expressed a very similar view:

Since I started comparing different cultures and thinking about them, I have started to value my own culture more. I think I have become more optimistic about the future.

The value and importance that the students have given to culture in their biographies is both refreshing and promising. I was personally very surprised at how much the students reflect about the cultural dimension of their learning and it is certainly not some kind of *background* to language learning for them. It is a core element in both their learning processes and moreover in their personal development as future language professionals and as Portuguese and European citizens.

In questionnaire B, the students were asked to think about learning culture as part of their foreign language learning. They were not asked to elaborate on their opinions as they were in their biographies. Rather they had to decide to what extent they agreed with questions based on language-and-culture learning as an integrated concept on a scale of A (strongly agree) to E (strongly disagree).

The results of this questionnaire follow on in table 8, page 116. A complete copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2, (pp.175).

Table 8**Statistical Results of Questionnaire B: *Learning Culture in a Foreign Language Course.***

The questionnaire was distributed to 40 fourth year foreign language students studying English/German and Portuguese/English at Aveiro University, semester 2004/5.

	<i>Agree Strongly</i>	<i>Agree to some extent</i>	<i>Indifferent</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree strongly</i>		
1	97%	2%	----	1%	----	1	Culture an essential part of language
2	39%	58%	2%	1%	----	2	Extend cultural dimension of language course
3	75%	20%	2.5%	2.5%	----	3	Culture helps me to communicate better
4	65%	32.5%	----	2.5%	----	4	Through other cultures I reflect about mine
5	35%	62.5%	----	2.5%	----	5	All English-speaking cultures valid for study
6	75%	20%	2.5%	2.5%	----	6	Culture develops sense of citizenship
7	75%	37.5%	25%	27.5%	----	7	Grammar and accuracy most important
8	40%	57.5%	----	2.5%	----	8	Communication is most important
9	12.5%	47.5%	12.5%	15%	----	9	Culture can be detrimental to linguistic accuracy
10	27.5%	62.5%	5%	2.5%	2.5%	10	Culture can contribute to linguistic accuracy.

The fact that the students value culture as a fundamental and integral part of their language courses is confirmed resolutely by the fact that 99% of them said that it is simply not possible to learn a language without its culture(s). In the focus-group discussions, the students were quite unanimous that it is culture which gives languages their 'human side' and makes them interesting. One of them said that culture is the *foundation* of a language and without it a language is empty and mechanical. Culture and language are intrinsically bound into a dynamic learning experience.

What is particularly revealing about this questionnaire, however, is that it points to gaps or doubts in students' understanding of the role of culture in the language-learning process. While being aware that the cultural dimension of their courses is important, the students were more divided and uncertain some of the key elements of intercultural communicative competence like self-reflection, mediation between cultural worlds, communication as meaning-making rather than an expression of words, and the critical dimension of valuing cultures in their own right. Only 39% were strongly in favour of extending the cultural dimension of their language courses. Most, (58%), agreed with the principal of more culture but with some reservations about what form this should take. Whereas all the students in their biographies had emphasised the fact that culture had made them reflect about themselves and their own cultures, in the context of their language courses, this figure dropped quite considerably to 65%.

In their focus-groups, I quizzed the students about these disparities. What was the difference between the personal value they had given to culture, and culture as they perceived it in their foreign language courses? The students remained united in their conviction that the cultural dimension of their language courses was essential but divided in how they thought culture should be developed in their courses. They felt that there was enough culture in their individual English, German and Portuguese courses but that these cultures should be co-ordinated more with one another and with the variety of cultures that pass through the department every year via Erasmus:

The more cultures that we learn about, the more everything becomes clearer to us and languages take on their own identities and 'vidas'. The experience we had this year of having three Polish students in our class was really great for me because I learnt so

much from them and what they said about everyday things in Portuguese life like coming late to classes, really made me think a lot. There is not just one culture, but a whole lot of European cultures we need to become aware of.

Another student commented on the need to co-ordinate culture throughout the various language courses so that they could have more chance to compare and contrast different cultures:

We have a whole cultural community in this department and we need to get together more in combined projects so that we can bring culture to life more and make it real.

This diversification of languages-and-cultures was mentioned by many of the students who emphasised the importance of *Erasmus* as a central part of university education, trips to England and Germany every year and visits to language conferences and institutes like the British Council and the Goethe Institute:

The university has a special role in helping us to broaden our horizons and in making us more culturally aware of things. I particularly enjoy doing research and presentations about the cultures I am studying. Everyone does something different and it gives us so many ideas and insights. What's more, it is a much more natural way to learn the language in context than doing grammar exercises and compositions in class which I think are a waste of time.

75% of students said that they agreed strongly that culture helped them feel more confident in communicating in the foreign language and a further 20% partly agreed with this concept. They expressed a need to try to *understand* other people and agreed that having native speakers as teachers was particularly motivating and very different from learning a language at school where they felt that grammar was over-important and that they spoke too much Portuguese:

I mean at school we were used to reading texts and answering questions about them.

It was always the same kind of thing. We would often discuss things in Portuguese. This just does not happen at university. We always speak in English or German and language learning becomes real because we learn with real people from those countries. You learn how certain people work, I mean, what is polite, what is not, so that you can avoid feeling embarrassed. This is much more important for us than getting the grammar right.

Many of the students added that they felt that they spent too much time in the classroom itself and felt that if they had more time and were guided by their teachers, could do more fieldwork, which could be assessed throughout the year. They were concerned about having too many exams and that it is difficult to test culture:

The trouble with culture is that there are so many different ways of interpreting things. I think it would be better not to 'test' culture at all. Culture is a very personal thing, I think. When I was in England, we could choose a project in any area of culture that interested us and that was really much better. I feel that we have no time in our schedules here for that and even if we do have a project, everything has to be tested anyway. I think this needs to change and we need to be given more autonomy and freedom to choose.

It seems from what the students discussed, that they did not reflect as much between the culture they were learning and their own cultures in the classroom because they felt that each subject was very much segregated from another:

When I am in my English class, I do not think about Portuguese and when I am in my German class, I am totally absorbed in German. If there are no links established between these subjects, we don't make them either.

Due to the fact that the English language has taken on the global status of a *lingua franca* in so many contexts nowadays, it has become an issue to decide which English(es) to teach students and what English culture(s) might be, as English belongs to so many cultures and embraces so many different worlds. David Crystal writes:

... teachers need to prepare their students for a world of staggering linguistic diversity. Somehow, they need to expose students to as many varieties of English as possible.
(Crystal, 1999:17)

On the whole, the students' views did not conform to this vision of the cultural diversity of English. Most of them do not see the point of studying other English-speaking cultures because they feel that they are geographically closer to Britain within the European Union. Many of them also expressed a sense of resentment towards North America and the concept of globalisation. Only 35% agreed that all English speaking cultures are valid for study. One of the views which was repeated by several students was that:

Diversity is important and there is a lot of diversity behind the English language. It is the global language of communication and so we should all learn to speak English. But from a cultural point of view, I think that learning about British culture is what most of us want to do. It is much more relevant to our worlds and our own culture.

Certainly the students were particularly motivated by the fact that learning cultures made them feel part of a larger European community and gave them a sense of global citizenship. Three quarters of them expressed that learning cultures did broaden their horizons and that they welcomed the new dimensions that recently introduced languages into the department – Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Arabic and Hungarian – could offer them:

Learning about other cultures makes me feel that there are two sides to globalization: unity and diversity. I have also learned to respect my own identity and what it means to me to be Portuguese in the global village we live in. I think it's like salt and pepper. Let's use both.

The final three questions bring the concepts of language and culture together to try to establish whether the students value linguistic proficiency over cultural knowledge and awareness. There was certainly quite a lot of confusion about the importance of

grammar and accuracy. While only 7.5% stated that grammar and linguistic accuracy were their priorities in language learning, almost 40% agreed to an extent that these were more important than the cultural element, and a quarter of the students (more than in any other issue), were undecided. The confusion seemed to ensue from the fact that while they felt the idea of culture was a central one for many of them, culture was only a minor component of their exams and evaluation as a whole. Most of them also expressed anxiety about their future roles as foreign language teachers:

Of course culture is important, but when we are in our classrooms, the students will ask us something that we don't know the word for in English or German, so we have to really know our grammar first.

This idea was repeated by several students and it is an interesting one because once again language and culture have become separate entities. First one must get the language right and the culture can be learned later. However in other students, an awareness of intercultural communicative competence had been developed through their language-learning experience. Interestingly enough, these students did not mention their specific roles as teachers or students but as individuals with an interest in communicating with others:

I believe that above all, what we need to develop at university are the skills and the confidence to communicate with others. We need to understand and be understood. We need to get our message across. We need to become aware.

Another student re-enforced this opinion by emphasising the fact that competence in a foreign language is made up of grammatical competence, cultural competence and communicative competence:

When we learn a foreign language we must take into account that we all have different views and perspectives on things. Culture and language are constantly interacting so that cultural competence implies a profound awareness of the context and circumstances in which a language can be used appropriately.

This final quotation sums up the general feelings of optimism and hope expressed in this questionnaire by most of the participants in the study. There is clearly an awareness that the students share, which is beyond a functional notion of learning languages as a series of structures, rules and grammatical ideologies, or of learning languages as a means to an end – to become foreign language teachers. Learning to speak another language and to communicate with others is all about developing as human beings and about broadening perspectives and belonging to a larger world. It is, as Phipps & Gonzalez (2004) exude throughout their book about modern languages in higher education, all about the dynamics of *languaging*. It is a way of being and really a way of seeing the world in a positive way as a place full of encounters, possibilities, exchanges and opportunities with languages at its centre. It is about listening to others and making ourselves heard: ‘No speech is speech unless heard’ (Spivak, 1999:27).

The next chapter will explore, what is for many foreign language students at university, their most pivotal and transformative experience as intercultural beings: ERASMUS.

4.4 The Impact of an Erasmus Exchange on Learning a Foreign Language.

The third part of this study is entitled the *impact* of an *Erasmus* exchange because the opportunity to actually live in the culture of the language they are learning is perhaps the richest and most beneficial experience of a student's life to date and having spent a year abroad myself, I would add that it is a fundamental life-experience which always stays with you.

The *Erasmus* scheme gives university students the possibility of going beyond the classroom into another culture, a different language and a whole new world of values, routines and other ways of seeing things and living life. It is a totally unique experience, which should be a fundamental and integral part, not only of foreign language education, but of university education as a whole. Rather than being seen as a *year out* or a kind of *gap year*, it is much more of a *filling-in year* where students learn to become independent and responsible and where the strands of what they have been learning come together and make sense. It is only by experiencing things ourselves, by making decisions and by having to survive in different environments away from all that is familiar to us, that we *really* learn and grow as individuals:

Part of becoming a member of another community is precisely the process of constructing your own identity in relation to that of others. We are what others are not. We perceive the world through the time and space of the self, but also through the time and space of the other.

(Kramsch, 1998:43)

An *Erasmus* placement is an axiom of intercultural exchange and languaging. It is at once a sensitisation towards otherness, as it is a very personal learning curve about ourselves and our own cultures. For many of the students, it is the first time they have travelled to another country and lived away from home and all that is familiar to their daily lives. They are far from their friends, their weekend haunts, their universities and everything that has been second nature to them for the past twenty years. This step

alone is a momentous one in anybody's life. While on one level it is about improving language skills and gaining first hand experience of another culture, on a deeper level it is much more about taking a personal journey into other ways of life that will inevitably lead to some critical thought about one's own attitudes and embedded behaviours. As one of the students commented:

*I learned so much in Germany, though it was not all about the Germans. It was about myself. When we are living there we learn unconsciously. Actually, it's **fantastic** the quantity of things we learn. I was always surprising myself.*

The main aim of the *Erasmus* questionnaire (Appendix 3, page) was to try and capture some of these reactions towards other cultures and languages and to relate them to the theories of developing intercultural communicative competence and critical awareness of oneself and of others. How did the *Erasmus* experience contribute to students' skills and competences in communicating? Did the way they relate to others and see themselves change at all? How did direct contact and experience of the target culture compare with their classroom experiences?

The *Erasmus* questionnaire was given to the ten students in the English/German and Portuguese/English courses who went to Germany and England for a year in 2003/4. In relation to the rest of this study, I wanted to keep to the same group of students that I had been teaching over this period because I know the students and therefore would be in a better position to observe any changes in them after their *Erasmus* experience. It also enabled me to compare their attitudes, skills and competences after *Erasmus* with the other students in the class who did not go away.

The *Erasmus* questionnaire is split into two parts. Part (A) focuses on language with the aim of finding out how students see their proficiency in the L2 before they go away compared with when they come back. It also asks them when they speak the L2, where, in what contexts and with whom. Does speaking the L2 make them feel different? When did they revert back to speaking their L1 and how did being immersed in the foreign language-and-culture differ from language learning in the classroom.

The second part of the questionnaire is all about culture. It probes beyond students' initial motivations to improve their language knowledge, to try and learn how the experience might have affected them as people and to see if their attitudes towards otherness and themselves had evolved in any way. Having read a study carried out by James Coleman in 1994 (in Byram & Fleming, 1998) on intercultural perceptions among university undergraduates in England, which concluded that spending a year abroad seemed to reinforce stereotypes and in many cases (up to 30%) results in students having a more negative view of the target culture when they returned, I was interested in finding out if this was true of Portuguese students. The students were therefore asked about any thoughts or stereotypes they had about the target cultures before they left and if these had been maintained, reinforced or changed through their 'hands-on' experience of the culture. The students were then asked to reflect on their own culture and the 'new' culture by comparing them, to establish what insights they had gained into their own cultures and if this helped them to relativize the L2 culture. Which aspects of the new culture did they find easy to adapt to and which elements were more difficult? Could they imagine living in that country/culture? Finally the students were asked to evaluate what they felt that they had learned by going on an *Erasmus* exchange and whether they considered that it should be an integral part of their language education at university. The last question asks them specifically to comment on how the experience had helped them personally and if they felt they had become better and more confident at communicating with people outside their own cultures and world experiences. 'A European area of lifelong learning will empower citizens to move freely between learning settings, jobs, regions and countries in pursuit of learning' (CEC, 2001:2)

The first question asked students to say if their proficiency in the foreign language had changed over their Erasmus exchange on a scale of 1(poor) to 5(excellent). Most students said that their language skills were good (3) before they went away and that they felt that they had improved considerably to very good (4) and even excellent (5) by the time they returned. Most of them said that they really made an effort to speak the L2 as much as possible and those who were in Germany found themselves speaking a lot of

English which became a language of communication across several cultures. Students said that they were surprised how much confidence it gave them to hear native speakers praise their language skills:

People responded to me in a really positive way when I spoke German and I think it also made them more interested in me and my culture, too. This made me feel good and encouraged me to speak German.

I was curious to find out if the students experienced the notion of being mediators between languages and cultures. Did speaking in another language make them feel 'different' in any way? Some interesting aspects emerged here. Students felt generally that they were able to communicate very well in everyday situations and it did not matter if they could not find one word or another because they learned to improvise and sometimes even mix languages. However when the language really seemed to matter was when they wanted to express deeper feelings or emotions and in these situations they found themselves switching between languages in an attempt to communicate more effectively:

Rather than thinking about one language or another, I found myself using my instinct. It was this instinct that told me how to behave in different situations. I could express specific thoughts better in one language than in the other. I think that German is a good language to complain in. When I use Portuguese I am definitely more emotional. English became a kind of neutral language to include others who could not speak German or Portuguese.

Another student commented:

For the first time I thought about how the language works and I was always thinking why people were using one expression rather than another. In the end the urge to communicate is greater and we use what we know and learn in a short time because we learn inside the moment.

The initial worries of the students about pronunciation and lack of vocabulary began to diminish and become arbitrary concerns. Through these processes of communication, the students begin to question what they had always thought as 'natural' or taken for granted. It is this concept of stepping outside the boundaries of one's group and experiencing otherness *first hand* which Byram (1998) says is 'crucial to the concept of interculturality'. Experiencing the differences in others brings us to a better and deeper understanding of ourselves. It is what E.T.Hall (1976) calls the achievement of 'passing through the eye of a needle' and as the metaphor suggests, struggle tends to bring out the best in people.

The other side to struggle is the element of so-called 'culture shock' which the students experienced in various ways as they tried to adapt to their different lives in another country. Some of them mentioned homesickness after the euphoria of their arrival and once the more routine life of their university courses had set in. However, it is true that in order to appreciate the good things, one has to have experienced some negative aspects, too. It is all *part* of the experience and the way we learn to adapt and become sensitive to others. It also takes time because we need to observe patterns of behaviour over a period of time to make sense of them. Moreover, experiencing the differences of another culture brings us to a better and deeper understanding of ourselves.

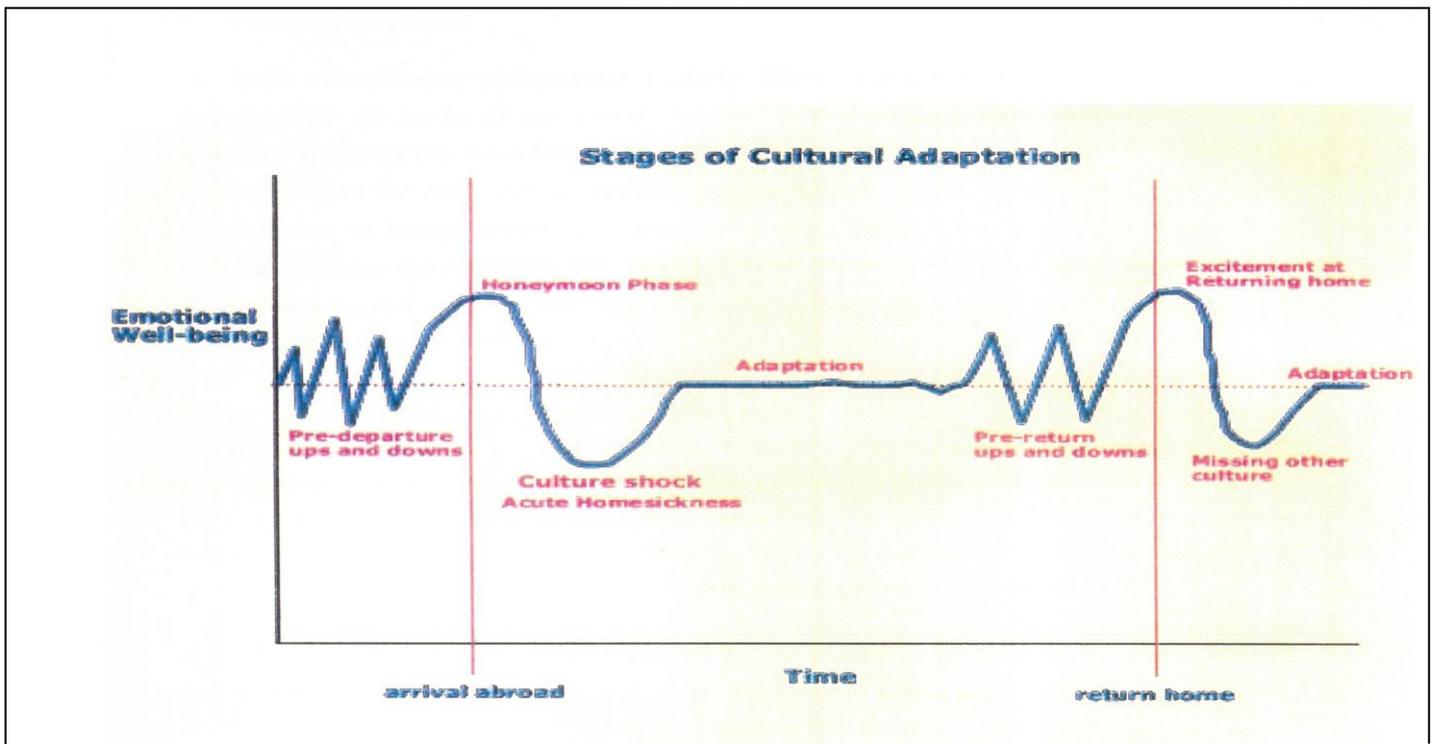
It is this process of being far away from daily routines which makes the difference because it makes us sensitive to every little detail that is somehow not part of these routines which are often so embedded within who we are, that it is impossible to step outside them while we are in our familiar home environments.

Figure 11, on page 128, shows how adapting to another culture involves different stages of ups-and-downs. This is a natural process and adapting and mediating between cultures is not something that can be learned from a book, or from someone else, it is something we have to experience and survive through ourselves.

Figure 11

Culture Shock and Phases of Adapting to a Foreign Culture.

(Kohl, 1994: www.suiteuniversity.com)



Dr. Robert Kohls: *Cross Cultural Living*

(www.suiteuniversity.com)

A number of students commented on the distances they felt in both German and English cultures, which is very different to the proximity of the way Portuguese people live and socialize:

In Portugal we place a lot of value on our families and friends and we always spend a long time having dinner together. In England people do so many things in the evening. They like to do sports a lot and go to clubs. There was always something going on at the university at night and that was really positive.

In this next example, we can observe how experiencing difference for ourselves breaks down stereotypical ideas:

I had this idea before I came that Germans were cold and unfriendly people. This idea came mainly from other people and even from the media. The German people were indeed different to the Portuguese. They don't like to touch or kiss one another and spend a lot of their free time in one another's houses and not in cafés like we do. It takes longer to get close to them but when you do, you will have a friend forever.

Another student speaking about her experience in England wrote:

When I travelled by tube it was so quiet and everybody seemed to be reading books and newspapers. It was not like here where people always make a lot of noise. It doesn't mean people are unfriendly though. They often travel further to go to work than we do and I noticed that they value distance and their own space.

These comments are particularly enriching because they show how the students' have gained an awareness of otherness and how they have learned to adapt to difference and incorporate it into the way they see the world. As one student pointed out, living in another culture made her aware of what she called the 'bigger cultural aspects' that you cannot learn in the classroom:

To enter other cultures is to re-enter one's own, understand the supercomplex variety of human experience and become more deeply human as a result.

(Barnett, 2000)

This concept is expressed really clearly through what the next student says about the way she feels different when she speaks German in Germany:

I think that with every new language that we learn to speak, we become 'someone else'. This might sound extreme. It is not that I think I have changed, but I do adapt myself to the person I am talking to. I don't have all the words that I would have in my own language and so gestures, body language and intonation are much more important. I slip into different roles. Erasmus is unique in this way because we just cannot do this in the classroom.

What about the issue of stereotypes? The students' answers were very lucid as they began to draw lines between stereotypes and what I would define as 'typical characteristics' which every nationality has. Therefore when asked to write down what students perceived as typical characteristics of the Germans, these traits were in fact confirmed by what the students observed in their daily lives. The Germans *are* very organised, punctual and responsible people. They do like to plan everything in advance and these traits are what the students noticed almost immediately, because the Portuguese are generally not well-organised, prefer to leave planning to the very last minute and there is always *time* for a coffee before work starts. These are the first characteristics that students will observe when they go to different countries and it is a positive thing, because it what makes us all unique and what makes life diverse and interesting. There is, however, a difference between such typical characteristics of daily life and stereotypes which are not based on life, they are just skin-deep and are often negative representations. What this survey showed, was quite the opposite to Coleman's findings that *Erasmus* had reinforced stereotypical ideas. Notably all the students said that the stereotypes they had had before they went to England and Germany were not confirmed through the realities they experienced. Here are some examples of what they observed:

It is true that there is more distance in German families than in Portuguese ones but this has really good points. I was surprised at how independent German girls are. They have a lot more freedom when they are in a relationship, for example. I had this idea that Germans were very conservative but this just wasn't true. People are very liberal and dress as they like and go out with who they want to. Nobody stares at them or gossips like they do in Portugal. It really opened my eyes.

Another girl spoke about her experience in England:

I had this idea from school that the English were cold and conservative but the opposite is true. The girls in my residence were really funny and very helpful. They liked going out and they all played sports, which we don't do here in Portugal. I think they value you as a person and not because of the clothes you wear. The English are not bothered about wearing brand names. In Portugal we often judge people by them.

Apart from these observations of culture and interaction with other cultures, *Erasmus* is also a valuable experience because it gives students an insight into university life in other countries. In this way it provides a possibility to initiate changes in universities by bringing them closer together and through exchanging ideas and ideologies:

In England I was expected to speak a lot in the classroom. It surprised me that students had to bring most of the materials and books to class and talk about them. It is not like here where we do not tend to speak in class. It was much less formal in England and that made me more confident.

What is impressive about the whole *Erasmus* experience is the wealth of ideas and insights that the students bring back with them. Their stories begin with a quest to improve their language skills but when they return, it is what they have learned about the culture, the people and themselves which is most important and which is the unique experience that most people can only enjoy once in a lifetime. Afterwards the students finish their courses and are tied down by other commitments. *Erasmus* is often talked about in terms of broadening horizons but it seems to me that it goes much deeper than that and gives students the real life impetus to think, to feel and truly experience

otherness in the true sense. T.S. Eliot once wrote that the first condition of understanding a foreign country is to *smell* it. This perhaps is the essence of the invaluable lesson and experience in life that *Erasmus* offers to foreign language students at university, and why it should be an integral part of their language-and-culture learning and essential training in preparing them to be critical and democratic citizens of a twenty-first century European Community. On the same subject of the positive effects of developing intercultural communication skills by communicating with a diversity of cultures, Stephan Dahl (2000) says that ‘the more communicating partners know about the world of meanings of the Other, the better are the chances for *true and effective communication*’ (my italics).

In Table 9, on page 132, each of the ten students was asked to sum up the essence of what their *Erasmus* sojourns had taught them and what it had given to them as individuals. The diversity and depth of their responses speaks for itself.

Table 9

ERASMUS: A Journey of Discovery.

This table represents the views of the ten students in this study who went on ERASMUS in 2003/4.

**It was great to be part of something real - I felt connected to people.*

**It is only when you have experienced what it is like to be a foreigner yourself, that you can appreciate how foreigners in your own country feel.*

**It was the hardest thing I've ever done, but the most meaningful. It was a big thing to let go of everything that is normal to me.*

**It was great to experience what it is like to be in a minority.*

**Before I came to England, I had never even travelled to Lisbon before. Now I want to travel more and meet people. I'd like to go back and study in London.*

**I have learnt more about myself and my subject in six months than in all my years at school. I also know now who my real friends are.*

**Spending time away from home in a completely different culture has made me so much more open-minded and it has also made me think about the way I am. I made a really good friend who is gothic. Looking at her, she couldn't be more different from the way I am. Yet we discovered that we had so much in common. I realised that if I'd met her in Portugal, we'd have never made friends.*

** It was just exhilarating. Everybody should do it. It will change your life.*

** It is a lot more than learning about another language and getting to know a new culture. It is about getting to know ourselves.*

** It was hard at first because everything was different. Then something just clicked and it all started to make sense.*

**I lived with a Muslim girl during the war on Iraq. It made me realise how people are made out to be different when they are just as human as we are.*

In the introduction to this study, I discussed the role of the university in the Europe of knowledge and the importance of valuing the fact that while Europe is a single union, it is made up of a diversity of nations, communities, cultures and language groups. The ability to understand and communicate in other languages has become a *basic* skill for all European citizens because the European Union is built around free movement of its citizens, capital and services. Therefore citizens with good language skills will be in a better position to take advantage of this mobility and these possibilities. Moreover, learning and speaking other foreign languages will encourage citizens to become open to others, more tolerant of difference and to participate in a much wider community than their local one. To what extent are university students being prepared to fulfil these roles and become critical citizens who have a sense that they can participate in this European space? In order to try and answer this question, I carried out a series of short focus-group interviews to ask students for their views. The questions that framed these discussions are in Appendix 4 on page 180. The students continue to be the same forty undergraduates studying to become English/Portuguese and English/German teachers.

The focus groups were usually made up of four to six students from both the aforementioned courses. In the first instance, I wanted to establish why they had decided to study foreign languages at university and what the concept of being able to communicate meant to them in a more holistic sense, rather than ‘just’ language learning. I asked them what their courses involved and how they felt about the scope of subjects that they were able to study. How did language learning at university compare to their experiences at school?

As before, students’ motivations to study languages were much wider than academic goals. Most students said that it was a fundamental part of education to speak languages and communicate with others. It is a curiosity to learn about others, understand cultures and be aware of what is happening in the world. One of the girls interviewed was a Polish student on *Erasmus* and she said that learning languages had given her *space*. Learning English had enabled her to ‘escape from a closed society’ and to travel and have her own life. Another said how languages gave her the sense of the ‘differences’ which she wanted to learn about and overcome because language barriers prevent

people from being able to ‘live together and learn together.’ Languages help the students to feel that they are ‘taking part in a wider world’ and that they have access to that world through knowledge of the culture and skills in other languages. Once more the students outside the confines of the classroom talked about language-and-culture as being intrinsically linked and important to their sense of who they are as people and how they relate to others:

Being able to communicate with other nationalities is a gift. It is not an innate ability. We must learn to acquire and develop it as we go along. The more people we meet, the better it is and the more I understand who I am and what my possibilities are.

Another student added:

I think we see the world according to our own culture and language, so our vision of the world is connected to the language we speak. I came here because I wanted to learn about other people and talk to them. Perhaps it might lead me to a different life somewhere else. It is all about opportunities.

When asked how studying at university was different to learning languages at school, the most frequent answer was the contact that students have with native speakers. While the focus at school had been on written proficiency, at university the students felt part of a community where they had to speak other languages and it was ‘natural’:

When you know you are talking to a native speaker, you really do make an effort to communicate with them in English, German or whatever. What’s more, I have also become aware how good it feels when these foreigners ... sorry, but you know what I mean ... when you have made the effort to learn my language and speak it.

On the other hand, many students were critical of the fact that their studies were too structured which meant that they had very little freedom to be able to choose different options:

Usually when we have choices they are not choices at all. I am very interested in new technologies and ESP, for example, but I had to study American Literature instead. I think that we should be able to choose across a wider range of subjects and that we should have time in our schedules to do these options. University education is about learning to become responsible and being able to go in different directions.

Another student made a general comparison between her *Erasmus* experience in Germany and in Portugal. She commented on the fact that in Germany she was very much left to her own devices when it came to doing research and putting her course together. Her studies were her responsibility and she was expected to participate in classes and present her point of view:

Generally we sit and listen in class here and in many classes, we are not asked to give our opinions, but to quote what the books say. I think that at university, we should be able to participate more and that teachers and students should interact. In England and Germany there is a much more informal relationship between teachers and students which gives us more confidence to speak and feel motivated to say something real.

In these more personal interviews, many of the students commented on their insecurities about the future and were more negative than they had been previously, in terms of their low-morale within the university community. When asked to clarify this feeling they were united in the view that the role of foreign languages needed to be given more value.

Everybody nowadays is studying 'gestão' (management) and new technologies but you can't do any of these things without languages and communication skills. The problem is that languages – especially English - are being 'dumbed-down'. Many students just study one semester of English and they think they know everything. In my opinion, the university has to broaden language courses to include lots of different aspects so that we can be seen as language professionals in the first instance, which would give us more opportunities to get better jobs and to feel valued for what we have learned.

Another student then added that in order for them to be ‘employable’ after their courses, they should learn other subjects related to business and technology as well. However she emphasised the importance of the human dimension of learning a language is lost if languages are just learned to be able to write business letters or negotiate in meetings. I asked if they felt ‘European’ in any sense and if this wider dimension been part of their university experience. The students who had been away on *Erasmus* certainly had a greater sense of a European dimension and some of them said that it had made them prepared to travel and go to other countries to look for work. However, generally, the students who had spent four years studying in Portugal to be foreign-language teachers, could not see beyond that. They were not prepared to leave Portugal and try to get jobs in other countries or try new experiences. They talked of feeling trapped or let down by the fact they had been studying for a long time and now there was nowhere for them to go:

I personally feel that many of our courses are too theoretical. We should be given more opportunities to go on practical experiences, perhaps in local companies and learn other skills. We need more help with new technologies and this needs to happen right through the course, not just in a semester. We also have too many exams and often the students who are the best communicators do not get the marks they deserve. Universities need to be less academic and more linked to the real world of work and people.

In an online document entitled *Teacher Education-Visions From In Europe (2003)*, Michael Byram echoes many of the students’ views on the need for language teachers to be valued by society and for university education to be *more* than a training college or a language centre. Universities need to embrace a new vision of language *educators* rather than teachers, people who can participate in the European context and help their learners in turn to become plurilingual citizens:

What teachers need is an education which helps them to understand their role, the significance of their work for individuals and societies, as suggested in the EU White Paper. They also need more than this. They need an education which enables them to

become involved in educational values, in moral and political education and in the promotion of democracy.

(Byram, 2003: 8)

To conclude this chapter it seems clear that the university must play a key role in educating people to be not simply professionals in their fields, but much more to be participating and active citizens at the forefront of a European Community which is shaped by diversity and difference, but unified through people and human values. The concept of plurilingualism is a dynamic one and suggests that learners have to be *given the opportunities* to choose their learning paths and how they are going to continue their learning throughout their lives. Learning a foreign language at university needs therefore to be experiential rather than prescriptive, to diversify rather than to specialize and to offer a range of opportunities and perspectives rather than one way to one specific career. If future teachers are to prepare their own students to be plurilingual, they must learn these skills and competences themselves. However this process is not automatic and teachers and their students need to work as a team discovering languages and cultures and developing active language communities in the university which will help to prepare students for living and working in a wider European community when they leave. Branco and Moreira emphasize the fact that language learners need to ‘*discover new perceptions* of social reality and *different ways* of solving social, aesthetical and economical problems’ so that they can reach an understanding of different cultures and the diversity of expectations within those cultures (Branco & Moreira, 1996:590), (my italics).

5 Conclusions

5.1 Summary and Conclusions of the Study.

Setting out to learn a foreign language is, perhaps more than any other subject on the curriculum, *all* about people, about the way they live, how they interact with one another, how they think and how they engage with the wider world. As our worlds have become ‘wider’, in every sense, through new technologies, and increased mobility in both our working and our private lives, the necessity and also desire to communicate with one another has never been greater nor more fundamental to our well-being as humankind and to our economic prosperity within our European Community. In order to feel that we belong to a community and are valued in our lives, we need to participate and make a difference in that space. We need to be able to communicate with many different people, across several borders and within a diversity of cultures and languages:

Proficiency in several Community languages has become a precondition if citizens of the European Union are to benefit from the occupational and personal opportunities open to them in the border free Single Market ... Languages are also the key to knowing other people. Proficiency in languages helps to build up the feeling of being European with all its culture, wealth and diversity and of understanding between the citizens of Europe.

(CEC, 1995:48)

Learning languages in this new millennium has taken on a third dimension. As well as learning about the cultures of the languages they are studying, learners should also be able to reflect critically about their own cultures too and to mediate between different cultures and learn to communicate in different ways and in a variety of situations. Most of all they need to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals and to be open and tolerant of different perspectives, values and behaviours. This third dimension is citizenship and we can only become citizens of a community if we can participate and share our ideas and cultures with others in a democratic space, through open-minded attitudes and also interest in others, engagement in different ways of thinking and being. Learning to live and work alongside others is a challenge and it is

also an ongoing process of learning, of adapting and creating new perspectives and reaching understanding across several levels, not just linguistic ones. It is this challenge which is at the *heart* of intercultural communication and at the *heart* of foreign language education:

To learn a new language is to create a new identity irrespective of the foreign culture or foreign experience.

(Evans, 1988 in Alred, Byram & Fleming, 2003:22)

This study set out to define what intercultural communication might be and to investigate what students' motivations to learn foreign languages were. Were they focused on linguistic proficiency and being able to speak a language like a native speaker, or were they more concerned about learning to understand other peoples and cultures to be able to communicate with them? How did they perceive themselves as part of the European Community and did learning other languages make them more critically aware of themselves, their cultures and their views of the world they live in? Were their language courses preparing them for this single European Union and did they feel a sense that they belonged to this wider community and were they ready to become a part of it in their working and personal lives? What did students see as the gaps in their intercultural communicative competences and how might universities fulfil these needs in the future?

It seems to me that the aim of research is not just to come up with answers, but rather to ask questions and take time to reflect about our practice as teachers and language learners. It is also to engage in discussions with one another and our students about the ideas and issues within our daily practices and beyond into the bigger picture outside the university. Higher education, no less than schooling, is located within a current climate of consumerism, individualism, efficiency, regulations and attainment of targets as a marker of personal worth and human values. It is what Smith and Sachs (1995) describe as an 'erosion of community and collegiality' in the face of 'new managerialism'. It is this mood of competition and getting the best marks which erodes a sense of what we are *really* supposed to be working towards through education,

namely to develop attitudes and skills among students which will help them to participate actively in their future communities and hopefully provide them with experiences which will make them into better people. Through this research it is clear how valuable it is to step back and take time to talk with our students as people and not as number 21474 in our class. While the students were generally not familiar with the terminology of intercultural communicative competence and European documentation on developing critical attitudes through learning languages-and-cultures, they were sure that their main motivations to learn languages were to communicate with others, to have more opportunities, to try to understand others and to be able to share their knowledge as teachers with their students in the future. What is interesting is that these motivations change when they are seen in the context of the classroom where grammatical excellence was frequently placed above cultural knowledge and attitudes. This follows the old adage in teaching that if it is not tested, it is not taught, which has the effect of making students disregard and devalue the aspects of language learning that will not be tested and evaluated. Nevertheless the students were aware that language learning without culture and knowledge about other beliefs and behaviours is meaningless. This disparity between motivations and the goals of language learning in an academic context is something that needs to be addressed and which I will discuss in chapter 5.2.

One of the most interesting outcomes of this research was to learn how valuable and enriching the ERASMUS programme had been for the students. I mentioned in the previous paragraph how students were mainly motivated through their linguistic achievements within the classroom. Indeed the main reason that students had said they wanted to go away on an *Erasmus* exchange was to improve their language skills and their confidence in speaking the language. However when they came back, most of the students had changed their perspectives completely. Yes, they had improved their language skills but much more than that, they had succeeded in living in another culture and getting to know other people themselves, which had not only broadened their horizons as far as their knowledge of others was concerned, but the whole experience had made them reflect about themselves and become more sensitive and aware of who they are. It also made them see through stereotypes they had had about other cultures and make them think in a critical way about their own embedded values and outlooks.

This reaction from one of the students about her experience in Heidelberg reflects this personal growth:

*My experience abroad was a very positive one. I loved it. My German is much better – I feel I can actually **speak** German now, which is what I wanted to achieve. More than this though, is that I have learned about myself and who I am and how other people see me. Lots of things I never noticed before or never had to think about because I wasn't aware of them.*

The overwhelmingly positive response to *Erasmus* has made me feel even more convinced that it should be an integral part of foreign-language-learning at university. Of course some students go through negative experiences and perhaps they will return feeling that they could not adapt to living in Germany or England. Is this negative though? I would argue that life is all about contrasting elements, of good times and bad, of happy and sad, but is this not the way we learn about life and what makes it worthwhile and gives it meaning? If everything were perfect, we would not appreciate these feelings which are all part of being human and of being actively engaged in life, rather than observing from the sidelines. The wealth of insights that the students gained from their experiences cannot be learned in the classroom, or passed on by teachers, just as they cannot be learned within one language community. We need to step outside and look back through the window to see what is really happening. Kristeva (1991) says that each of us has 'inner' and 'outer' aspects and being open to ourselves also means that we must open up to our 'otherness'. To be intercultural is to be a 'stranger to ourselves', as the title of her book suggests, and it is also about being a stranger to others.

Considering all the positive experiences, insights and knowledge that the *Erasmus* students had gained, it was very disappointing to find out that so few students had taken up this opportunity to live and study abroad. While many will always say that it is because of financial difficulties that they do not go, one of the real reasons which emerged through our discussions on *Erasmus*, was that students did not really know about it, in the sense that they did not feel *prepared* to go. Twenty-five percent said that they felt unprepared and rather afraid of going so far away. The question of *Erasmus*

and what it involves had never been raised in the classroom or discussed. This is a real issue, which universities should take up. It is true that we tend to forget all too quickly what it is like to be young and perhaps because young people seem to grow-up so quickly nowadays, their insecurities are overlooked. Some students also said that not all teachers at university were positive about students 'going away' for a year and they were worried about gaining equivalences for their courses and perhaps getting lower averages. This is a problem of the over-importance given to students' final grades, which detracts from the view of education as a holistic experience and from the idea that students should emerge from a university education as more rounded, balanced and critical individuals.

I would therefore conclude this section by saying that in order for students to learn to value their language learning experience, it must be valued by the teachers as well. After all, students do look up to teachers and are motivated and inspired by teachers, often more than by what is taught, as this only really comes to life through the teacher and through teachers and students working collaboratively both inside and outside the classroom. As far as *Erasmus* is concerned, students need to be prepared for this experience and it needs to be integrated into their studies before they go away and again when they return. Learning to communicate with people from other cultures and developing attitudes, skills and competences to deal with different situations and diverse environments requires preparation and time to reflect, to exchange and to discuss things:

Any learning at the preparation stage needs to draw on students' prior experience and current knowledge, feelings and attitudes in order to influence what takes place during, and possibly after the residence stage. Awareness raising activities should offer students insights into the processes involved in adapting to change, and ultimately, being intercultural people.

(Hall & Toll, 1999:9)

It is often imagined that schools in Portugal and in other parts of Europe are generally monolingual and monocultural learning environments. While this is certainly no longer true of schools, it is even less of a reality in universities, with students coming from

different countries, speaking other languages and having spent time living in a diversity of countries and cultures. It also emerged that most of the students have regular contact with friends and family in other countries and that they are increasingly using the Internet to chat to people from all over the globe. Therefore universities must tap into this cultural and linguistic diversity and interest in otherness. Other languages and cultures are not some distant phenomena anymore. They are right here in our classrooms and they can be observed in the ways that the face of Portugal and indeed the rest of Europe is changing through globalisation and mobility of people across Europe. This means that there are lots of questions in the air that we should be discussing in our classrooms at university and a lot of changes and developments which students need to discover and learn to cope with and live with in a critical and responsible way. This process of exploring, discovering and learning is one which extends beyond language learning per se, as it extends beyond the classroom and academic criteria for passing exams. The skills, attitudes and competences that form the basis of successful intercultural communication need to be developed across a much wider space and it seems to me that the university is the ideal forum for providing students with these opportunities. The language department within a university is a whole community of different languages and cultures and of people of different ages who come from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, religions and life experiences. It is a real-life resource for students to learn how to deal with difference, to begin to develop tolerance and understanding of otherness and to gain the impetus to want to go out into the world and learn more, as well as to make a contribution as human beings and language professionals.

5.2 Recognising and Assessing Intercultural Competences.

The problem of how to assess students' intercultural communicative competences is perhaps one of the reasons that it tends to be marginalized in the curriculum. While it is simple to assess learners' acquisition of information and knowledge of grammar, it is much more complex to test learners' competence. How can such tests be objective and what kinds of socio-cultural facts should the students be learning? The danger is that the social patterns of the dominant cultural group would be the ones to be represented in such tests and so we are back to perpetuating national and social stereotypes.

According to Byram & Zarate (1997), the problem lies in the fact that knowledge and factual recall are only one dimension of the competence which the Common European Framework calls 'socio-cultural', but which others define as 'intercultural competence'. As we have seen, intercultural competence describes a broad field of knowledge involving the five elements of attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, of discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness. In short, to be intercultural is to be able to see relationships between different cultures – both internal and external to a society – and to mediate between and then de-centre oneself. It is to be conscious of one's own perspectives and cultural outlook and to have a critical understanding of one's own and other cultures.

It is clear from this short study of foreign language students at Aveiro University, that assessing knowledge of their linguistic skills or giving a test on a specific culture is in no way an adequate test of intercultural capabilities and experiences:

What needs to be tested is learners' ability to step outside, to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange, and to act on that change of perspective.

(Byram & Zarate, 1997:9)

It seems to me that a teacher cannot set a test to measure students' ability to communicate with other cultures in terms of trying to quantify if their attitudes have changed, or if they have become more tolerant, or have developed critical attitudes

towards their own culture and the foreign one. A much more practical and productive solution would be to use what has been adopted in business language courses at the university, namely that students record their learning and intercultural experiences themselves in a portfolio. It should be what Byram calls a 'record of learners' competences' which is the most 'desirable' way forward in language education for the future (Byram & Zarate, 1997).

Together with the Common European Framework, the Council of Europe has developed a European Language Portfolio. An outline of what the Portfolio involves is given in table 10, on page 147.

Table 10**The European Language Portfolio**

The Passport
<p>The Passport section provides an overview of the individual's proficiency in different languages at a given point in time; the overview is defined in terms of skills and the common reference levels in the Common European Framework; it records formal qualifications and describes language competences and significant language and intercultural learning experiences; it includes information on partial and specific competence; it allows for self-assessment, teacher assessment and assessment by educational institutions and examining boards; it requires that information entered in the Passport states on what basis, when and by whom the assessment was carried out.</p>
The Language Biography
<p>The Language Biography facilitates the learners' involvement in planning, reflecting up and assessing his or her learning process and progress; it encourages the learner to state what he/she can do in each language and to include information on intercultural experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts; it is organised to promote plurilingualism i.e. the development of competencies in a number of languages.</p>
The Dossier
<p>The Dossier offers the learner the opportunity to select materials to document and illustrate achievements or experiences recorded in the Language Biography or Passport.</p>

What is particularly appealing about the Language Portfolio is that it makes the students both more responsible for, and also aware of their own language learning. Their own experiences of foreign languages and contact with other cultures are recorded and documented in the students' own words. Anybody who has ever asked students to keep journals or diaries of their work and to record their own opinions about their learning will share the view that it is a more autonomous, personal and fruitful way of documenting and assessing what each student is about. It is an essential forum for self-expression between individual students and their teachers and both benefit greatly through this more personal interaction.

From my own experience of language testing, it seems to me that the ability to really communicate with others has consistently been under-estimated. However through the Portfolio system there is a link between the desire to foster student autonomy in the classroom and to encourage students to broaden and develop their knowledge and skills independently outside the classroom, through their own experiences and research. Rather than accumulating marks in exams, these experiences, *Erasmus* exchanges and participation in cultural projects and initiatives will also form part of a students' profile and academic qualifications. Students will be able to keep a record of their intercultural experiences and assess them. This will help them to think about what they have learnt, reflect about how they coped with difference and related to other people and see for themselves that they have hopefully become more tolerant of others and reached a better understanding of what it means to be intercultural and critical. On another level, I believe that students' self-assessment in their portfolios will give them a greater sense of what they have hopefully learned and achieved during their university careers. It will also provide a much broader and holistic picture of the student than just an average mark on a sheet of paper. Employers will be able to see what students have been involved in during their courses, what languages they have learned and where they have studied, if they have been on industrial placements and how students are able to record these experiences and express themselves. It will certainly encourage students to take an active role in their education, rather than just believe, as many of them do now, that it is all about exam marks. A final aspect of the Portfolio, which is worth mentioning in the

context of intercultural communication, is that it will also reflect how well students can communicate and relate to other people, how they work in teams and if they are willing to take on new challenges. All of these aspects are fundamental in developing a European dimension within university education, where skills and qualifications are transferable and transparent across different cultures. Taking responsibility for one's education is also a fundamental part of becoming an active and respected citizen in the European Community. Finally keeping a personal Portfolio is a way of fostering a sense of one's value in society and of encouraging lifelong-learning and personal development:

An individual's capacity to know himself as an individual, his ability to develop a sense of self ... is a function of the capacity to language.

(Doughty & Thornton, 1973:61)

5.3 An Agenda For Foreign Language-and-Culture Education at University.

In a time of crisis within higher education and particularly within Humanities departments where educational goals and values are not necessarily linked to economic ones, it is up to the teachers to react against this ranking of courses and skills as consumables and to put the *human* back into the humanities. Universities are only valuable if they have students and a process of ongoing learning and development. Naturally these are linked to society in that the university should prepare students for their professional lives within that society. Yet the purpose of higher education must surely be to go beyond these increasingly narrow concerns with higher education's contribution to economic growth.

My concern throughout this study has been closely related to what kind of society we might build and what attitudes, skills and competences might be fostered that would educate language students in a more holistic way and prepare them to participate in and create a democratic society, which is based on human rights and values. If we are to achieve this we ought to be following the lines of what the British mathematician and philosopher A.N. Whitehead (1929) said when he stated that the justification for a university is that it 'preserves the connection between knowledge and zest for life'. A 'zest for life' is one of those wonderful phrases that cannot be translated and it encapsulates what I have referred to throughout this study as the 'thrill of discovery'. It is a way of seeing knowledge as the key to living and as something which awakens our curiosity to get to know other people, to discover their cultures and to try to develop something of value on which to build one's life. It is also about fostering an awareness that people need to live and work together and to do that we need to learn to value other people and listen to what they have to say. In order to exchange ideas across our European community, it is necessary to speak other languages and develop an understanding and awareness of how other cultures and societies work, beyond the gloss of economic similarity and global branding.

The agenda for universities must therefore be to develop intercultural competences among its language students because Europe will need *language professionals* who have been exposed to various languages-and-cultures at university and who have lived in other countries, to work as mediators between cultures and to cross borders to build communities which have to begin with people, not economics. Language courses must be valued as such within universities and in society as a whole. In order to achieve this goal, those of us that learn and teach foreign languages, must resist the influences of short-term economic goals to become some sort of language-skills-providers. Being plurilingual is not about accumulating bits of languages to add to a curriculum vitae. What is needed are new perspectives towards the *value* of knowledge and the need to have *time* to develop competence in the process of learning one language which can later be transferred across to other languages as well. As Claire Kramsch (1993) says, to be ‘fluent’ in a language is far more than a ‘technical skill’. Barnett also rejects this contemporary attitude towards languages as marginal skills in higher education which can be added on as students go along:

To reduce human action to a constellation of terms such as ‘performance’, ‘competence’, ‘doing’ and ‘skill’ is not just to resort to a hopelessly crude language with which to describe serious human endeavours. In the end, it is to obliterate the humanness in human action. It is to deprive human being of human being.

(Barnett, 1994:178)

Speaking a language is all about living a language and the university must provide students with the opportunities to *live the language*. Students should be engaging in a whole range of activities and tasks which involve the language(s) they are learning. Language-and-culture are fundamental elements in any language course. It seems to me that at university, students should not specialize at the beginning of their university careers in one area of language learning or the other. The courses should be interdisciplinary which would give the students the freedom to explore and discover what languages are all about and where their interests might lie. They should be encouraged to move between fields of business, literature, translation, didactics, European Studies, marketing and new technologies so that they have a broader outlook

at the start of their studies which can always become more specialized as they develop special interests and expertise in certain fields. University should not be about putting people in moulds, which they feel that they are later trapped in. It should be about providing students with choices, developing their knowledge and helping them grow as individuals by making them more responsible for their learning. This concept of a more flexible and mobile learning environment also means that teachers at university should be given regular training and should collaborate across different areas and with other universities across Europe, too.

A further important facet of studying at university as opposed to learning at school is that students have chosen to come to university and have decided what they would like to study. Therefore it can be presumed (and this was shown in the questionnaires) that they are also motivated to learn, which is often not the case at school. The students are also older and are expected to be autonomous and responsible for their studies. From this point of view, I would argue that it is fundamental for teachers at universities to work much more closely with their students. It is not a case of the teacher standing in the front and telling the students at the back what to do. There must be a much more professional collaboration of people working together to do research and to learn with one another and from one another. This is especially true in the foreign language classroom which is all about exchanging thoughts, sharing cultures and discussing ideas. It is all about being active and doing things, and not about sitting passively and listening. It is much more about working in groups than front-of-the class lecturing as in other areas like maths and statistics. From my own experience, it is essential to develop a productive and collaborative atmosphere in the foreign language classroom, otherwise students will be afraid to speak or participate, which is detrimental to developing any sense of empathy, curiosity or positive attitudes towards other cultures. After all, if teachers do not value the cultures and ideas of their students, how can students develop positive attitudes of openness, tolerance and respect for others?

Universities are frequently referred to as institutions and often criticised for being 'removed' from real life. In response to this, initiatives have been proposed to bring universities closer to society and to prepare students for the world of work and business.

Languages must be linked to the marketplace. This is true but it is only *one* aspect of what studying at university should be about. It is of little use to prepare students for specific jobs and careers if this means that their studies and ambitions are narrowed down just to meet these economic targets. Developing students' intercultural competencies and preparing them for the local, national and global communities they are going to live in, means that the university should be fostering a whole range of other competencies and links as well. Rather than seeing the university as an institution which for me has connotations of a closed and inward-looking space, the university of the future should be much more integrated into the local community. Instead of being a place which is open during the day, rather like an office, it should be open in the evenings and offer possibilities for students and members of local communities to do a variety of different courses, learn other languages and participate in learning and sharing knowledge. At the moment, all the Portuguese courses for the *Erasmus* students are run in the evening, which is fine, but as such, the *Erasmus* community is separated from the students who are there during the day. In a foreign-language department, we should be working together to build a community and make the university a social space and not just an academic one, which students leave as soon as their classes come to an end. What is missing at the heart of this community is a café or what used to be called a common room, where people can sit together, enjoy a cup of coffee and chat, meet other people and socialise *within* the university, with students from other courses, with teachers and with *Erasmus* students. This would be a real multicultural and multilingual community where *languaging* would take place naturally and where intercultural skills would be developed in a natural and diversified environment.

Finally universities in the future must engage with one another across Europe. A mobile society requires higher education to be mobile as well, and for both students and teachers to move, train and study between universities and to co-operate about their courses and in fields of research and shared interests. The *Tempus* programme is a higher education cooperation scheme between EU member states which has been set up to foster and support collaboration in the field of education and to also enhance understanding between cultures. Alongside *Erasmus*, it is another initiative to encourage intercultural communication and lifelong-learning:

Cooperation on higher education strengthens and deepens the whole fabric of relations existing between the peoples of Europe, brings out common cultural values, allows fruitful exchanges of views to take place and facilitates multinational activities in scientific, cultural, artistic, economic and social spheres.'

(www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/tempus)

At the beginning of this study I said that it was a privilege and a really a gift to grow up with two languages and within two cultures, and be able to spend a lot of time travelling. Certainly this love of languages, curiosity about other cultures and desire to travel as often as possible to as many different places as I can, is something that has enriched my life in a very positive way and made me more open and tolerant to others and keen to discover other ways of living and seeing the world. My role as a language educator at university is, I believe, not just to teach languages, but to try and transmit these experiences, insights and the *thrill of discovery* that learning about languages-and-cultures brings to our lives. Communicating with other cultures is to be oneself because at that moment of successful interaction with otherness, we forget about nationalities, race, religion, class and social rules or behaviours which have been imposed on us, consciously or subconsciously and we just think of ourselves as *human* and it makes us feel thrilled that we have this capacity to talk to others and share our experiences. We do not lose our culture, we just keep adding to it. This is what I like to call the *thrill of discovery* which is at the heart of intercultural communication, understanding others and getting to know ourselves. I would like to finish with two quotations from the cultures I have added to my passport and which I feel sum up the essence of *interculturality*:

Lá fora, sobretudo quando viajo sozinho, sou um homem novo, sem país, sem destino, sem passado nem futuro: apenas o tempo que passo. E assim, porque sou verdadeiramente livre e desconhecido, acontece-me frequentemente tornar-me íntimo amigo de pessoas que acabei de conhecer há meia dúzia de horas. Tudo é genuíno e generoso nesses encontros e, quanto maiores são as diferenças, mais evidente se torna o que é essencial nas relações entre as pessoas. Não esperamos nada uns dos outros,

apenas o privilégio de viajar juntos, beber uma cerveja juntos, ficar a conversar por uma noite adiante.

Out there, especially when I travel alone, I am a young man without a country, without a destination, without a past or a future: just the time that I spend. It is then, because I am truly free and unknown, that I often become closest of friends with someone I have only known for just a few hours. Everything is genuine and generous in these encounters, and the greater the differences between us are, the clearer it becomes what is essential about human relationships. We do not expect anything from one another, simply the privilege of travelling together, drinking a beer together and talking together through the night.

(Miguel Sousa Tavares, 2004:231)

*Eine fremde Kultur
kennenzulernen –
dazu gehört Bescheidenheit
und Fleiß.
Und große Offenheit.*

*Getting to know
a foreign culture -
requires modesty
and hard work.
And a great deal of open-mindedness.*

(Peter Bamm 1970)

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Appendix 1 : Student Biographies

Questionnaire A: *Intercultural Communicative Competence – Student Biographies.*

This questionnaire aims to investigate why university students learn foreign languages, what languages you choose, why you choose these particular languages and how you expect to use your language skills in your personal and professional futures. What role does culture play in language learning? What are your attitudes to other cultures? Does your language training at university prepare you to communicate with others? Please spend some time thinking about your answers, as the aims of my research are to try to develop strategies to help you to become better intercultural communicators. Thank you!

Georgina Hodge (2.2.7)

Part 1: Your background

Name: _____ Age: _____

Course: _____ Year: _____

Nationality: _____ Mother tongue: _____

Parents' nationalities: mother: _____ father: _____

1) Do you have family living in other countries?

Yes No

a) If yes, say where and if you have regular contact with them?

2) Where were you brought up?

3) Have you ever lived in another country? Yes No * (*please go to *Part 2*)

a) Which country/countries and what was the reason you lived there?

b) How long for? _____

c) Was it a positive or negative experience? Give reasons for your answer.

d) Can you speak that/those languages? _____

4) What languages do you speak at home?

5) Would you like to move back to that country or perhaps another country?

Yes No

a) Why?/Why not?

Part 2: Language and motivation to learn a language

1) What language(s) do you speak? _____

2) Why do you want to learn this/these languages? (e.g. professional or personal reasons – both? ...)

3) Is it more important for you to be able to speak the language or write it?

4) What skills do your language classes focus on? (i.e.: listening, speaking, reading or writing)?

5) What kinds of activities do you find most useful? Can you say why?

6) How long have you been learning English, German ...?

7) Do you ever use the languages you are studying outside the classroom?

Yes No

If yes, when and where do you use them and with whom?

8) Do you think that learning other languages helps you to be a better communicator?

Yes No

a) Why/Why not?

9) Do you think everyone should learn at least one foreign language? Yes No

a) Why/Why not?

10) What is the role of language learning in universities?

11) Does your language training prepare you to communicate with others?

Yes No

a) Why?/Why not?

12) How would you rate your language ability on a scale of 1-5? (1=poor – 5 excellent)

(written) English German

—

(spoken) English German

—

Part 3: Culture and understanding others

1) On a scale of 1(essential) to 5 (irrelevant), what importance do you give to the role of culture in communication? (Circle your selection).

1 2 3 4 5

2) Give (a) reason(s) for your selection.

3) Do you think that knowing about the culture of the language you are learning helps you to communicate more effectively? Yes No

a) Why/Why not?

4) Have you been on an Erasmus exchange? Yes No

a) Why?/Why not?

5) Some would say that spending time in the country of the language you are learning is *essential*. Do you agree or disagree with this view? Yes No

a) Why/Why not?

6) If you have been on an Erasmus exchange, has the experience helped your studies?

Yes No

a) In what way(s)?

7) Do you think that an experience working or studying in another country should be a compulsory part of university education? Yes No

a) Why/Why not?

8) '*Communication is culture and culture is communication.*' (E.Hall) Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Yes No

a) Why / Why not?

9) Does learning about other cultures and lifestyles make you reflect about yourself and the culture you live in? Yes No

a) Why / Why not?

10) Has the way you perceive your own culture changed in any way since you began studying languages at university? Yes No

a) In what way(s)?

Please add any further comments/suggestions you have related to foreign language learning at university:

Appendix 2: Language-and-Culture

Questionnaire B

Learning culture in a foreign language course

2004/2005

Key

A = *strongly agree*, B = *agree up to a point*, C = *indifferent*, D = *disagree*,
E = *strongly disagree*.

Please circle your answers to the following questions.

1. Learning about the culture(s) of the languages you are studying is an essential part of your language course?

A B C D E

2. The cultural dimension of your language course(s) should be extended.

A B C D E

3. Studying culture helps you feel more confident in communicating in the foreign language.

A B C D E

4. Learning about a foreign culture makes you reflect about your own culture.

A B C D E

5. All English speaking cultures are valid for study as part of your EFL course.

A B C D E

6. Learning about other cultures helps to develop your sense of European and global citizenship.

A B C D E

7. Grammar and linguistic accuracy is what is most important to you.

A B C D E

8. Communicating and learning to understand others is what is most important to you.

A B C D E

9. The study of culture in language classes can be detrimental to linguistic accuracy.

A B C D E

10. The study of culture in the language classroom can contribute to linguistic accuracy.

A B C D E

Appendix 3 : Erasmus Questionnaire

Questionnaire C: *Interculturality*: Erasmus Questionnaire 2003/4

*The students who went to the UK were given the same questions about England/ English.

Part 1: About you

Name: _____
Age: _____ Sex _____(m/f)
Nationality: _____
Mother tongue: _____
(indicate if bilingual): _____
e-mail contact: _____

University: _____
Name of course: _____
Year: _____
Languages studied: _____
Length of Erasmus visit: _____



SCALE of 1- 5		
1 = none	2 = fair	3 = good
4 = very good	5 = excellent	

A) LANGUAGE

1. What was your knowledge of German before you went to Germany (a) and when you returned (b) ? (0-5 (a) _____ (b) _____

2. How did you manage to communicate in L2 in the first few weeks...(0-5)
a)_____ and then on your return? (b)_____

3. . When did you use German outside the classroom? (i.e. only when necessary or other times?)

4. How did German people react to you when you spoke 'their' language to them?

5. How does being 'immersed' into the language and culture differ from learning German in the classroom?

6. When did you revert speaking your own language? (i.e. perhaps when you are tired, speaking to a friend from 'home' or when you need to express yourself.)

7. Do you feel like a different person when you speak German?

8. *Are there any words in German that don't exist in your language like kushelig or Streicheleinheiten and vice versa?*

9. Do you think that speaking German enhances your life / you in any way apart from the fact that knowing other languages is always an advantage?

10. Would you say that your Erasmus visit has given you more confidence and a deeper understanding of the language and how it is really used in daily life?

B) CULTURE

1. What were your motivations for going on an Erasmus exchange?

2. What ideas/expectations did you have about German culture before you arrived? Can you say where these ideas came from? (i.e. books, teachers, won ideas)

3. To what extent were these ideas confirmed or rejected during your stay?

4. How did the Germans react to your culture? Did they know much about it or were their ideas stereotypical ones?

5. Did any aspect of German culture particularly surprise you? (positive and negative)

6. If you had to write down what you perceive as *typical* characteristics of the Germans, what would they be?

*-----

*-----

*-----

*-----

7. What did you really like about Germany and living in Germany?

8. Do you think that you could live there for a while or would it be too difficult to adapt?

9. Are there aspects of the German culture that you find hard to deal with or that conflict with your culture? (perhaps punctuality etc.)

10. What are the main differences between your culture and German culture?

11. Has your Erasmus experience changed any of your ideas / stereotypes about Germans or other cultures you came into contact with?

12. Do you think that an Erasmus exchange should be part of your university education? Why / Why not?

13. Has the fact that you are communicating with other cultures on a daily basis made you more confident and perhaps a *better* communicator? (can you explain ...?)

Any other comments about the value of this experience:

Appendix 4: Interview Guide for Focus Group

1. What does learning a language mean to you?
2. How does learning languages at university differ from school?
3. What role does culture play in your language learning?
4. What culture(s) do you learn about?
5. Does learning about other cultures develop your sense of European / global citizenship?
6. Is learning a language a skill?
7. What is intercultural communicative competence?
8. Do you find it easy to communicate with people from other cultures?
9. Does learning about other cultures make you reflect about yourself?
10. What disciplines do you currently study as part of your course?
11. How many of these subjects could you choose?
12. Would you like to have more options?
13. How do you see the future of language learning at university?
14. Would you like to have contact with language students at foreign universities?
15. Would you like to suggest any changes?

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