An introduction to proteophilic competences: on assessing interculturality
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Abstract:
This article aims to re-examine different ways of working with interculturality and its assessment in higher education. Following a review of various definitions of intercultural competence and misconceptions about it, a model of intercultural competence (‘proteophilic competences’ or the appreciation of diversity) is presented and discussed.

Résumé:
Cet article propose une synthèse de récents travaux sur l’interculturel et son évaluation, appliqués à l’enseignement supérieur. Différentes définitions de la compétence interculturelle seront passées en revue et soumises à critique. Pour finir, un modèle de compétence interculturelle (‘compétences protéophiliques’ ou l’appréciation de la diversité) sera proposé et discuté.

Do your teachers assess interculturality in their lectures?
- I don’t know how to answer this question. All I know is that there is no clear indication that they do.
- Yes, I think that they do, but certainly in an abstract way, because I haven’t noticed anything.
- I guess that it depends on the course (and the lecturer).
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Introduction

The concept of « interculturality » has been flourishing in recent decades and it has contributed to the development of the notion of culturespeak, as described by the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1999). Despite impulsion from the work carried out by the Council of Europe, physical and virtual hypermobilities and the massive arrival of foreigners in most countries, interculturality does not seem to have been entirely integrated into language teaching and learning (Sercu et al., 2005), regardless of the multiple research projects and publications on the topic. One could even say that the « draw » of interculturality is starting to weaken, while other concepts such as plurilingualism are attracting more attention. So why still deal with it?

Intercultural competence (which is the expected outcome of the insertion of interculturality in language learning and teaching) is a vital competence in our contemporary world, especially for specialists involved in mediating between people from different countries (diplomats, language teachers, consultants, journalists, translators...)(Jaeger, 1995: 269). If one introduces this competence in one’s teaching, one needs to develop ways of making sure that it is acquired (or developed, depending on how one sees the competence - cf. infra). This aspect is very problematic and it is easy to see in the students’ speech above that, even in a department where the emphasis is placed on developing intercultural competence (which is the case in my department in Turku), assessing it remains a mystery, even for its users.

In most language departments in higher education, the concept of interculturality has not had as much success as in secondary education and is unsatisfactory. Some initiatives, however, are exceptions to the rule (intercultural awareness in Great Britain, cf. Phipps & Gonzales, 2004 ; Roberts et al., 2001 ; Kelly et al. 2001 for a review of the state of the art in Europe; Dervin, 2006a, 2007b in Finland). The variety of approaches in these initiatives is so wide and eclectic that it seems difficult to provide a real synthesis'.
Generally speaking, the humboldian and philological traditions (the latter has a structuralist and purely cognitive vision of ‘cultural learning’), along with the proviso of academic freedom, which allows departments to decide upon their curricula and teachers to introduce objectives which seem best suited for their educational context and which are close to their own research interests, seem to have slowed down the expansion of interculturality in higher education (Jaeger, 1995: 267). Moreover, even when some departments include interculturality in their programmes, there is no guarantee that the concept is understood in the same way by teachers themselves and learners: in fact, it is often confused with cultural, transcultural or multicultural approaches. In fact, some teachers assert that they incorporate ‘interculturality’ while in fact what they incorporate is pure culturalism. Finally, as Lies Sercu et al.’s study (2005:11) on secondary language teachers’ perception of interculturality in different countries demonstrates, it is highly likely that some teachers in higher education are « favourably disposed » or « unfavourably disposed » to including interculturality in their lessons and that their dispositions depend on their training, fields, research interests...

This article is exploratory in nature. It aims to suggest different ways of working with interculturality and its assessment in higher education. Under no circumstances does it try to impose interculturality on those who do not « practise » it - it will however allow me to share some reflexions, experiences and a general model of competences that can help teachers reflect on assessment of intercultural competences. At a time when otherness is omnipresent in higher education (physical and virtual academic mobilities), where identity crises due to the liquidity of our times are common (Bauman, 2001) (not only stereotyping, xenophobia, but also xenophilia...) and where professionalisation of higher education is a real and concrete objective (Jaeger, 1995: 268), it is important – even urgent – to reflect on the following questions: What do we mean by interculturality and intercultural encounters? How can one meet the other? How can one present oneself to the other? In short, what does meeting someone consist of?

As the main emphasis of this article is on assessing intercultural competence (or the hypothesis that assessment may be possible), it is necessary to define the concept of intercultural competence. To do so, I will present a model of intercultural competence (that I call ‘proteophilic competences’) that I have been developing over the years (Dervin, 2004, 2006ab, 2007b), highlighting its components, different ways of assessing them and most importantly the types of questions that teachers should ask themselves when trying to both implement and assess the competence. My attitude to assessing intercultural competence is cautious and rejects societal and academic urges to assess everything – I will therefore not present any miraculous solutions or ready-made recipes.

**Definitions of intercultural competence**

Intercultural competence is a concept that seems to be transparent, that seems to be universally understood and used, but which has many definitions which are often contradictory – when, of course, its users actually bother to define it. Let us take for example the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the European Council on Key Competences for Education and Life Long Learning (2005) which puts forward eight key competences, among which interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competences are to be found. It is interesting to note that nowhere in the document is any specific definition of intercultural competence proposed by the authors. Did they assume that Europeans share the same subconsciously agreed-upon definition of the competence while, as we will shortly see, intercultural specialists themselves do not even share the same precepts?

In order to define intercultural competence, an extremely controversial and polysemic term needs to be looked at: culture. In short, one could say that two main definitions of the concept are present in the literature on language learning and teaching (Unesco, 1980; Morain, 1983):

- Culture with a capital C refers not only to cultural artefacts of a country (art, literature, cinema...), but also information on a Nation-State (geography, history, institutions... ). Liaw (2006) calls this conceptualisation of culture factual transmission. This aspect has long
been the focus of most language departments in higher education. It is illustrated by research on the development of a cultural competence (cf. for instance Valette, 1986).

- An anthropological/sociological view of culture (ways of life of a people, sociological comparisons between different countries) has garnered interest with the introduction of communicative language learning and teaching and the subsequent intercultural approaches (Kramsch, 1998; Byram, 1997). Varied methods to integrate this second paradigm in language learning and teaching have been used in higher education: the study of texts (inspired by cultural studies), ethnography (Roberts et al., 2001), etc. One of the main objectives of these methods is to help linguists and non-specialists to acquire intercultural competence. This second concept will be retained in this paper.

Let us now look at the competence in itself. I first draw upon the following insight from Tania Ogay (2000: 35):

The first studies on intercultural communicative competence were particularly tainted by a pragmatic concern to lead to better efficiency or competence in situations of intercultural communication (my translation).

At the beginning, intercultural competence was conceptualised in order to find ways of both proving that people were able to communicate interculturally and also (and more specifically) to show their ability to spend some time abroad for a short or long term stay. Over decades of research on the competence, several phrases have been used to describe it: «cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, multicultural competence, transcultural competence, global competence (...)» (Deardorff, 2004: 32).

Hundreds of definitions have been given by researchers worldwide (cf. Deardorff, 2004 who provides a synthesis). Three recent definitions will be retained here: the first one is taken from the extremely influential Routledge Encyclopaedia of language teaching and learning (Guilherme, 2000), the second definition was negotiated by «top intercultural experts» and provided by Darla Deardorff (2004), and the last definition is by Lies Sercu (2005):

Intercultural competence is the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures that we recognise as being different from our own. 
Guilherme, 2000: 297

The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes. Deardorff, 2006: 238

Let us reflect for a moment on the use of the adverb «effectively» in both definitions, which shows that the pragmatic concern, described by Ogay, is still very much present. The adverb seems to imply that one should be able to say if someone communicates effectively «interculturally» or not (if this is an objective then it should be tangible and assessable). It is also noteworthy that different verbs are used in the definitions: interact in Guilherme’s (which seems to include at least two individuals, two interlocutors) and communicate in Deardorff’s (which doesn’t directly integrate the other). On the other hand, Guilherme mentions directly the individuals who are involved in the act of interaction (people from cultures and we), while Deardorff simply speaks of «intercultural situations». In Deardorff’s definition, it seems like it is up to the user to display the ability to communicate (cf. «one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes »), thus ignoring the role of the interlocutor.

The third definition is more detailed and contains more challenges for any individual who wants to become competent:

(...) the willingness to engage with the foreign culture, self-awareness and the ability to look upon oneself from the outside, the ability to see the world through the others’ eyes, the ability to cope with uncertainty, the ability to act as a cultural mediator, the ability to evaluate others’ points of view, the ability to consciously use culture learning skills and to
read the cultural context, and the understanding that individuals cannot be reduced to their collective identities.
Sercu, 2005: 2

First of all, this definition provides evidence, from the objectives it sets (which are idealistic: who can claim that they are able to do all this?), that assessing intercultural competence is all but impossible. A simple example: the first item - « the willingness to engage with the foreign culture » - leads to two problems: 1. how might one prove the authenticity of such enthusiasm in an individual (they might pretend to be “willing”)? 2. Is it really possible to meet a culture (and not individuals)? One can also wonder about the possibility and/or ethical issues included in « the ability to evaluate others’ point of view ».

Now let us turn to the most exhaustive and influential definition of intercultural competence: that of Michael Byram (1997 and later). Byram has defined five savoirs (1997: 50-53), or components of intercultural competence, which are complementary to a language learner’s communicative competence (the author actually calls it ‘intercultural communicative competence’). Byram explains that intercultural and communicative competences and their components are not isolated from each other but that they form a coherent whole. Byram’s model has a significant advantage: it sets clear objectives compared to other models. However, as I shall comment upon later on, these savoirs do no lead to assessment (e.g. the model lays emphasis on the honesty of the individual; while, once again, how could one be sure of, for example, the authenticity of curiosity or open-mindedness (two concepts that he uses)?).

Our review of intercultural competence couldn’t be complete without examining what the Common European Framework has to say about this topic. A close look at the document reveals that intercultural competence is actually absent from the competences defined by the authors of the Framework1. They are however included in the general competences of the Framework and they are modelled after Byram’s savoirs (CECR, 2001: 82-84): declarative knowledge savoir (knowledge of the world, sociocultural knowledge, intercultural awareness); skills and know-how (social skills, living skills, vocational and professional skills, etc. ) ; existential competence (attitudes, motivations, values,… ) ; ability to learn (language and communication awareness, general phonetic awareness and skills… ). If we take the example of intercultural awareness (cf. savoir), it is defined as follows:

Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the ‘world of origin’ and the ‘world of the target community’ produce an intercultural awareness. It is, of course, important to note that intercultural awareness includes an awareness of regional and social diversity in both worlds. It is also enriched by awareness of a wider range of cultures than those carried by the learner’s L1 and L2. This wider awareness helps to place both in context. In addition to objective knowledge, intercultural awareness covers an awareness of how each community appears from the perspective of the other, often in the form of national stereotypes.

Three essential points need to be commented upon. First, the Framework emphasises the importance of differences but also of resemblances between individuals (most definitions concentrate on differences and tend to try to help people understand them). The second point is the inclusion of regional and social diversity in each country and « a wider range of cultures than those carried by the learner’s L1 and L2 » - which shows an effort of diversification, which is in a way in contradiction with the singular of the word world at the beginning of the definition and the duality between the ‘world of origin’ and the ‘world of the target community’. The introduction of stereotypes, which are key elements in deconditioning language users and in the development of intercultural competences, is also appreciable (Dervin, 2006a, b). Finally, let us say that the framework doesn’t provide any progression table for the general competences.

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Misconceptions regarding intercultural competence

I am struck by people’s proclivity to talk as if culture were endowed with mind, feeling, and intention. Nor is this just a layperson’s way of speaking. Academics, anthropologists included, are as likely as anyone else to talk this way – as if culture had taken on a life of its own. Unni Wikan, 2002: 83.

Several misunderstandings, one might even say misconceptions, seem to influence the definitions presented supra, and have an impact on the implementation of intercultural competence in language learning and teaching. Before we begin to reflect upon assessing the competence, let us review some of these misconceptions.

The controversial Norwegian anthropologist, Unni Wikan, quoted above, points to the first myth that one encounters in many definitions of interculturality: that of the encounter between cultures. As Wikan asserts, one does not meet cultures, but individuals. This “quasibiologisation” of cultures (Hannerz, 1999: 42) was present in at least two definitions above: “the willingness to engage with the foreign culture” (Sercu) and “critical engagement with the foreign culture under consideration and one’s own” (Byram).

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

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

Let us now look at the ideas of the postmodern, hypermodern (Aubert, 2004) and liquid (Bauman, 2001) paradigms from the last decades, which not only postulate that the concepts of culture and identity are outdated, but also that it would be better to substitute them with concepts that could help translate the ever-changing nature and multiple constructions experienced by individuals. Martine Abdallah-Pretceille (1996) and Michel Maffesoli (1995) have put forward respectively the terms culturality and identification in order to signal all these diverse « modalities of presence in the world » (Hess & Weigand, 2006: XII, my translation).

Boumard asserts that the feeling of cultural homogeneity, which emerges from some definitions of intercultural competence, is « based on the positivist paradigm and more globally inspired by mechanistic scientism » (2006: 1). This feeling seems to suggest a super-adaptation (we might even go so far as to say acculturation: one supposedly becomes the other) by one of the interlocutors and thus the acquisition of fixed cultural elements which allow a language user to communicate with a « native » of the culture and language (e.g. in terms of non-verbality, attitude). Yet, some researchers (Byram & Zarate, 1997: 12; Davies, 2003; Dervin & Mutta, 2006) have tried to get away from practices of « native speakerness » because these practices are dangerous. This is due to the danger of imitating an imagined native model which is not representative of the diversity of the speakers of a given language or the inhabitants of a particular country (it should also be noted that such a model is often based on representations of a dominating cultural model).

Another misunderstanding is rooted in the absence of the interlocutor in most definitions examined above (Ruben 1989: 234). The definitions only mention the « user » of the competence and ignore the influence of the interlocutor and the context of interaction on acts of interaction (the phenomena of polyphony, dialogism and voice, which have been widely analysed by the dialogism and voice movements (Hermans 2004), have shown that any discourse is also marked by unidentifiable voices which have an impact on what is said and how it is said). In fact, any individual can be absolutely « interculturally competent » but s/he may be easily troubled by the lack of motivation of the other, her/his bad intentions, her/his language skills… The integration
of these acts of co-construction of discourse and interaction seems vital in the definition of intercultural competence. Basing her reflections on a similar conclusion, Tania Ogay suggests that we use the term intercultural dynamics (2000: 53) rather than competence to describe this double responsibility and engagement.

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

**Reflexions on assessing intercultural competence**

Our worlds are engraved with the «soft barbarity» of assessment (Le Goff, 1999) - a common practice in teaching - because one cannot but assess as «learners tend not to pay attention to what is not assessed and therefore demand that good assessment tools be developed» (Sercu, 2004: 74; cf. also Søderberg, 1995). As previously stated, intercultural competences have at least three aspects: cognition, affection and emotions. (Chen & Starosta, 1996; cf. also Byram (2005) who based his model of savoirs on these aspects in this document). Affection and emotions have an impact on competences and make them unstable.

Darla Deardorff asserts that one can assess intercultural competence, basing her assertion on her research on the competence (2006: 246). She explains that levels of competence should be clearly defined and that a methodology involving triangulation should be put in place in order to assess it. Many scholars and practitioners have tried to implement methods for assessing intercultural competences in their teaching. First of all, there are standard cultural tests which consist of multiple-choice questions that are easy to administer and correct (Hashem, 1995: 1), but which cannot provide information or evidence on somebody’s intercultural competence because they only test factual knowledge, which is sometimes generalised and stereotypical. Assessment tools, such as diagnostic scales (cf. for ex. Fantini, 2006; Allen & Herron, 2003) which are composed of Likert-type items (they are found sometimes in large quantities), have also been largely criticised. Ruben casts doubts on these tests, stating that: “the validity of data of this type rests fundamentally on the presumption that respondents have the desire and ability to engage in valid self-assessment” (Ruben, 1989: 231).

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

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

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

It is problem-focused, it only deals with experiences which reflect difference and there may be a tendency to focus on difficulties rather than pleasurable experiences, but «key experiences» are not necessarily difficult or problematic.
Byram finally adds that (ibid.): « requires a high degree of literacy and analytical skill », which many learners do not master because autonomous learning and the acquisition of competences of analysis – and as paradoxical as it may be - require training.

All in all, many criticisms have been targeted at these attempts. I will present some of those identified by Rubben in his research (1989: 235). First of all, he states that if teachers ask students to keep diaries and logs, there is a subconscious belief that learners are honest and blunt about their experiences, while intercultural learning usually takes place through “vagabond learning” which the learner may not always want to share. Moreover, the analysis of the portfolios or diaries which is carried out by the teacher not only leads to big ethical problems, but also to problems of validity, interpretation and objectivity. Also, in vivo observation of the students, for example, is problematic in terms of reliability and validity (which are essential criteria for assessment) as it tends to be subjective, and influenced by many external factors such as the observer’s tiredness, emotions and/or representations. Finally, I agree with Michael Byram and Carol Morgan (1994, cf. also Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2002: 79) who underline the fact that there is a lack of reliability between acts and discourse / discourse and acts: an individual may behave in an "appropriate" manner (though the meaning of this needs further explanation) in a certain situation, though he/she may be disgusted by his/her behaviour.

With all these criticisms, can one envisage assessing intercultural competences? It is clear that, as Geneviève Zarate and Aline Gohard-Radenkovic (2004) see it and in reference to the points made earlier, the answer seems to be more negative than positive, because, on the one hand, there is a lack of theoretical and experimental maturity as far as intercultural competences are concerned, and on the other hand, ethical issues lead to a dead-end (Zarate et Gohard-Radenkovic, 2004 : 5). In order to complement this reflection, and inspired by a series of questions that S. Moirand (1990) proposes to ask on assessing communicative competence in language learning, let us reflect on some issues for a moment before presenting our model of intercultural competence:

**Who can assess intercultural competence?**

As teaching and learning progress, learners can be provided with formative assessment (discussions with a « guide », other learners, foreigners, etc.); in other words, in cooperation with an individual in her/his mother tongue, in a foreign language or in a lingua franca. The use of self-assessment is also desirable, even if, as we said before, it is not reliable, we should bear in mind its usefulness in order to motivate metacognitive and metareflexive activities. For all these types of assessment, all the people involved should be trained (Holec & Huttunen, 1997) and have reflected on the problems posed by intercultural competences. They should bear in mind that intercultural competences are not acquired for life, and that an illimit number of factors intervene in their application (tiredness, strong emotions, contexts of encounter, noise...). Müller (1999: 333) tells us that the intercultural assessor (whether s/he is a researcher, a guide or a learner) should fulfill the criteria in order to be able to play his/her role correctly. This is why they should be aware of the objectives that are set to develop these competences.

**What should be assessed?**

As mentioned before, it all depends on the objectives. Among Byram’s savoirs which we presented above, the assessment of the development of savoir-faire and savoir-apprendre but also of savoirs could be envisaged (for instance, a learner should be able to demonstrate in an analysis that s/he possesses tools that were introduced in the teaching). As such, a main emphasis on knowledge should be avoided as it might crystallise certain images in learners.

**How should it be assessed?**

Continuous and formative assessment is necessary (Lewis 2005) in order to allow learners to become aware of their learning and especially to be able to decide upon objectives that they want to reach (in order to ensure progression). The assessed contexts and contexts of assessment should also be taken into considerations: it can be in vitro (in the classroom or though texts) or in vivo (in a foreign country or via the internet). Also to be considered is whether the assessment should take place in the learner’s mother tongue, in the foreign language or in a lingua franca or
in a mixture of all these? Finally, we should also bear in mind that the presence of the interlocutor should also be taken into account as, as we said before, s/he has an impact on the competence that is created by interlocutors. This can be done either by involving him/her in the act of assessment or by recourse to peer-assessment.

I shall now present different reflections on ‘intercultural’ learning objectives and how assessment could be envisaged in higher education through the definition of ‘proteophilic competences’.

**A proposal: working on the construction of identity - proteophilic competences**

This section proposes a general model which deals with the development and use of intercultural competences for language students in higher education, which I refer to as proteophilic competences (or the appreciation of diversity). I will first present the paradigms which form the basis of the model, before going on to discuss its components and present various questions raised. The model is the result of experiences which I have had at a department of French studies in Finland over several years. The methods of assessment are formative and are based not only on self-assessment and peer assessment, but also assessment by a «guide» (e.g. the teacher) of the acquisition of competences of discursive and enunciative analysis.

Among the various approaches to intercultural competences, I choose to highlight the «subjectivist» approach, which comes from Martine Abdallah-Pretceille’s distinction between objectivist-culturalist and subjectivist approaches (1996: 24), and the «hermeneutical» approach (Dahl et al., 2006). The approach is based on an examination of the co-construction of identities and cultures by means of the analysis of corpora obtained in vitro (novels, films, blogs, podcasts...viii) and in vivo (corpora collected by learners during fieldwork, in their own country or abroad). Thus the approach fully identifies itself in hypermodern and postmodern analyses of our contemporary worlds and concentrates above all on the development of savoir-faire and savoir-analyser (competences of analysis). Savoir-agir, which derives from the preceding savoirs, is taken into consideration only for the domains that are of interests here: university contexts (e.g. a learner has to prepare an argumentative presentation with a foreigner or take part in a forum on the internet in French as a lingua franca with Romanian colleagues), contexts of student mobility and professional contexts (traineeship). Other domains of interaction such as personal or familial contexts are not considered here. Finally the use of a task-based approach is desirable (Bourguignon et al., 2007) because it allows the learner to become more engaged.

Three key elements have been used for the definition of proteophilic competences:
- The importance of relationships in interaction is taken into account, in the co-construction of identities and images of who one wants to be, how one presents oneself and the other in interaction. Flahault explains: «the feeling of existing and being oneself does not emerge from one mere interior source: it emerges from a relationship, a circulation of one’s mind and what surrounds it »(2006: 76, my translation).
- Emphasis is also laid on the fact that each individual constructs themselves and that « in any act of interaction, it is well known that one never communicates with the person as s/he really is, but with a representation which we have of him/her and his/her groups of belonging, just as this person brings in the interaction act her own representations » (Ogay, 2000: 166, my translation). The notions of representations and stereotypes are therefore at the heart of the various analyses that are proposed to students so that they learn to recognize these mechanisms of construction in their own discourse and in that of the other.
- The concept of “the fantasy of Unicity” (Maffesoli, 1995, i.e. the idea that each of us has a unique self inside of them and that belonging to one’s group makes us the “same”) as well as the concept of “dissociative acts” borrowed from psychology («situations in which I am somebody and somebody else at the same time » Bouvard, 2006: 30, cf. Dervin, 2007b for an adaptation of the concept in intercultural communication) will be used. These two concepts are both reflections of the contemporary relationship to self and otherness: diversity (dissociation) and unicity, liquidity and solidity (Bauman, 2001).
Through these concepts, the approach requires that the students decentre and look at themselves.

The teaching methods are both proactive (« in vitro »: the student examines, analyses and draws conclusions based on texts - TV programmes, autobiographical novels, podcasts, transcribed interviews...) and reactive (« in vivo »: situations of encounters in class, via the internet, videoconference, in situations of exchange...). Both contexts have their advantages and drawbacks: in vitro methods are sometimes decontextualised (e.g. the case of an excerpt from a novel) but less risky for the learner; in vivo methods, on the other hand, can place learners in embarrassing situations and necessitate risk-taking. They nonetheless allow students to put their competences directly into practice. In vitro is a good beginning for first year students and as time goes by, the teacher can introduce in vivo activities in order to complete the approach (study abroad, cooperative activities with foreigners...). Along the path to interculturality, students will concentrate on the following:

- acquiring theoretical tools taken from anthropology, sociology, linguistics and cultural studies, among others, and read books and articles, follow lectures, listen to and watch conferences via new technologies;
- keeping a journal of strategies in which they discuss the strategies that they used to face certain situations of intercultural encounters;
- self-analysis: by looking back at a diary written along the years (the person involved must be trained to self-analyse);
- discussing as much as possible with people around them about the components of proteophilic competences (weekly meetings with colleagues, teachers, guides, tutors...).

The general model is composed of three components: two savoir-faire and one savoir-réagir/ agir. As in Byram’s model, these components form a whole. There is no progression (no « levels ») and it is open, flexible and should be reworked and adapted to learners’ needs. Every component (1-3) is expressed in the first person so that learners can use the model for self-assessment. One solution to each problem raised by the model is proposed so that learners may check their actions/reactions/strategies for adequacy, and decide upon objectives for themselves. The sections that follow the components (a to c) suggest reflections and questionings that are necessary in order to enrich the competence.

1. Savoir-faire I: Detect identification
   I am fully aware that every individual (myself included) is multiple and complex but that every (inter-)locutor can adapt their discourse to contexts and/or interlocutors by presenting a group or a national identity in order to please, confirm a representation or defend themselves. I know how to note and analyse pieces of evidence of identification in my own discourse as well as in the other’s discourse (in vitro and in vivo).
   As a consequence, whenever possible, I try not to present myself or my interlocutor through national images, stereotypes, generalisations and exaggerations...
   a. Individual plurality is not always visible because, in any context of interaction, one needs to select an image of the self (and of the other) and use it. Moreover, classifying by means of nationality is very common in intercultural encounters (it is often a starting point, an overture). Also, I need to remember that telling somebody that they are using auto-/hetero-stereotypes (« We Finns are like this ») can be problematic because I can come across as moralizing and/or unpleasant. Who is entitled to forbid somebody from using a national auto-stereotype? What can thus be done in such a situation? I can play the stereotype-game, cut the conversation short, change topics, or discuss the stereotypes with my interlocutor. With hindsight, I can reflect on why I, or somebody else, used stereotypes in interaction and how they were formulated.

2. Savoir-faire II: paying attention to discourses
   I am able to listen to discourses that I come across all the time (mine as well as others’) especially when they are potentially ethnocentric, xenophobic, racist but also exotic and xenophilic. I know how to ease such discourses by means of linguistic markers such as modalities and be as explicit
as possible by reformulating. I also try to avoid « interculturally correct », naive or contradictory discourse on the self and the other such as «I have no stereotypes», «I don’t believe in stereotypes but Finns are... », etc.

b.
This is where language skills can have a big impact on intercultural competences (mine and that of my interlocutor) because one cannot always control all the meanings and nuances in a foreign language and one can also shock one’s interlocutor without even knowing (they may not even be showing their real feelings in relation to this situation/context). What strategies could I use in such instances without putting myself at risk?
Secondly, the other can have a role to play in my use of language, with stereotypes being a case in point. For instance, there might be times when my avoidance of stereotypes is limited by an interlocutor whose position is hierarchically higher. How might I behave in an ethical manner in such a situation and try not to resort to stereotypes?
Finally, I should bear in mind that there is a potential gap between discourses and acts - in other words, I am aware that discourse can be contradicted by actions and vice-versa.

3. Savoir-réagir/ agir: controlling one’s emotions/behaviours
In delicate and difficult situations, situations of misunderstanding and disagreement, I make an effort to remind myself that individuals are human beings and that they have emotions, feelings, experience bad/good moods, personal problems... which influence their reactions. As such, I try not to draw quick and culturalist conclusions which may harm my relationships with others.
c.
How might I therefore control my emotions in difficult situations? What strategies could be used to avoid conflicts or worsening situations?
How might I go beyond feelings of déjà-vu, déjà-vécu, déjà-dit... and phenomena of polyphony which may affect my relationships with others (e.g. a person reminds me of someone that I do not like either because of her/his physical appearance or his/her accent in a foreign language)?

Conclusion: unfair assessment must be avoided at all costs...

The article has allowed us to look at the integration of cultural and especially intercultural components in curricula of language learning/teaching as well as the miscellaneous interpretations of intercultural competences contained in the literature. The questions and questioning raised in the article have allowed us to underline the fact that assessment of intercultural competences is confusing and that it necessitates serious and constant reflection. The model of proteophilic competences that I proposed in the last section represents an example of general learning / teaching objectives of interculturality which can be set as objectives for a whole university course, which can be constantly remodelled via input from the learners, transformed, completed, criticised... Its assessment should be limited to formative assessment through a panoply of methods, contexts and actors present in its realisation.

This has certain consequences on the position of the teacher in language learning-teaching and assessment of competences, because s/he also has to recognise and accept that s/he is not the absolute master (s/he must also be aware of his/her emotions, representations, contradictory discourses...). Furthermore, the teacher can no longer assume that s/he is always able to judge the development of intercultural competences of her/his learners by simply examining their written or oral speech, because it is unstable, ambiguous and calculated (i.e. students sometimes offer ready-made answers to please the teacher). The teacher can however guide learners in the acquisition of savoir-faire and savoir-analyser which will allow them to reflect and act. Another element is the importance of the other (who is present, absent, physical or « virtual » in constructions of identities and cultures which are operated in intercultural encounters - cf. the discussion of intercultural dynamics by Tania Ogay). Therefore, the proteophilic competences of one person cannot but be operated through negotiation and discussion with another person, who, in turn, must have recourse to their own competences. To assess an individual alone through his/her competences (e.g. by means of Likert-type tests or questionnaires) is thus unfair and must be avoided.

From what has been presented, it is clear that proteophilic competences are not permanent, « for life », and their practice and learning never end (hence my refusal to establish a
gradation, or "levels"). Formative assessment could help to follow up, motivate and encourage the learning of these competences. If we accept the idea of life-long learning (a notion which is adulated by the EU), interculturality is without a doubt one of its best incarnations because it is one of the domains where "man can but reach imprecision" (Jules Supervielle).

References


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


3 Ogay’s criticism of the fact that many researchers do not define competence is acknowledged here. Yet, adequate definitions and reviews of the concept can be found in Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2004: 25-31).


5 Cf. Byram (2005) which can serve as a synthesis of his studies.

6 The reader may also consult Dervin (2004), where the origin of the reflection which follows can be found.

7 I prefer to talk about the development of the competences as they are fundamental « human » and « societal » competences which every one of us makes use of on a daily basis – successfully or not.


9 Literature on various aspects of academic mobility is flourishing, cf. Dervin (2007c) and Byram & Dervin (forthcoming).