Instructor: Mr BOUNADJA Semestre:1

Level :First Year

Module :ICC

Course: **Two/ Intercultural communicative competence: awareness enhanced and foreign language classroom**

**Introduction:**

In the American education system, the development of students into global citizens has become essential. In foreign language (FL) education, many organizations and scholars have responded to this need. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the Modern Language Association’s (MLA) *ad hoc* committee have developed standards and statements that address this aspect of language learning. ACTFL underscores the importance of culture in Standards 2.1 and 2.2, defining culture in the form of products, practices, and perspectives (National Standards, 1999). The MLA *ad hoc* committee emphasizes that FL majors should develop into “educated speakers who have deep translingual and transcultural competence” (p. 3), which “places value on the ability to operate between languages” (pp. 3-4). This competence allows students to interact with speakers from other cultures and “reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of another language and culture” (MLA, 2007, p. 4). In the European context, Byram (1997) advocates for extending the interaction from a simple exchange of information to “understand[ing] and relat[ing] to people from other countries” (p. 5). Many scholars have investigated the move away from communicative language learning to intercultural communicative competence (ICC) or intercultural competence (IC) in FL education (Aguilar, 2007; Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2009; Liddicoat, 2002 among others). Although learners’ development of IC have been examined (e.g. Belz, 2002), fewer investigations on teachers’ development of IC, their comprehension of it, and their education in teaching IC to their students exist.

**Definition of ICC:**

Intercultural communicative competence, or ICC, refers to the ability to understand cultures, including your own, and use this understanding to communicate with people from other cultures successfully.

Example  
ICC could include understanding how gestures and the distance between speakers vary from culture to culture.

**Communicative Competence and the Native Speaker**

In the 1970s Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence to understand first language

acquisition, it was necessary to take into account not only how grammatical competence but also the ability to use language appropriately were acquired, thus placing emphasis on sociolinguistic competence among native speakers. This idea was taken up by Canale and Swain (1980) in North America and Van Ek (1986) in Europe, who applied it to foreign language acquisition and turned it into a fundamental concept in the development of communicative language teaching. The aim of communicative methodology was to acquire the necessary skills to communicate in socially and culturally appropriate ways, and, in the learning process, focus was placed on functions, role playing and real situations, among other aspects. Canale and Swain (1980) proposed that communicative competence was minimally composed of grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence (1980: 27–31):

- *Grammatical competence* includes the knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence grammar semantics, and phonology.

- *Sociolinguistic competence* is made up of two different sets of rules: sociocultural and discourse. The former focuses on the extent to which certain propositions and communicative functions are appropriate within a given sociocultural context, and the extent to which appropriate attitude and register or style are conveyed by a particular grammatical form within a given sociocultural context. Rules of discourse are concerned with cohesion and coherence of groups of utterances.

- Finally, *strategic competence* is made up of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that the speaker may resort to when breakdowns in communication take place due to performance variables or to insufficient competence. These strategies may relate to grammatical competence (how to paraphrase, how to simplify, etc.) or to sociolinguistic competence (for instance, how to address strangers when unsure of their social status).

At the same time, they insisted on the need to establish communicative interaction with “highly competent speakers” of the language so that learners would be able to respond to genuine communicative needs in realistic second language situations. On the other hand, they also proposed that learners should be taught about the second language culture in order to provide them with the sociocultural knowledge of the second language necessary to infer the social meanings or values of utterances.

A few years later, Van Ek (1986) suggested that foreign language (FL) teaching was not concerned merely with training in communication skills but should also involve the personal and social development of the learner as an individual, and, therefore, he presented a framework for comprehensive FL objectives which included aspects such as social competence, the promotion of autonomy or the development of social responsibility (1986:33–65), quoted by Byram (1997: 9). The model he presented contemplated six dimensions of CC, each of them called competence also. In fact, they are six points of view of a complex phenomenon, which overlap and are mutually dependent:

- *Linguistic competence*: 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 native speakers would normally attach to an utterance when used in isolation.

- *Sociolinguistic competence*: 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. ... [this] competence covers the relation between linguistic signals and their contextual –or situational– meaning.

- *Discourse competence*: The ability to use appropriate strategies in the construction and interpretation of texts.

- *Strategic competence*: When communication is difficult we have to find ways of ‘getting our meaning across’ or ‘finding out what somebody means’; these are communication strategies, such as rephrasing, asking for clarification.

**Culture awareness**

Culture awareness and ICC/IC has become an integral part of the FL classroom. Many scholars and educators remind us, languageinstructors that language and culture are to be seen as one entity (e.g. Agar, 1994; Kramsch, 2000). Instead of considering languageand culture as two separate units, Kramsch (2000) accentuates that culture is “the very core of language teaching” and should aidlanguage proficiency (p. 8). Studies by Chavez (2002, 2005) and Yang (2012), among others, on students’ beliefs and perspective oflanguage and culture in the FL classroom illustrate various results. Yang’s (2012) study on 35 students found that the learners chose aFL for different reasons. Motivation, textbooks, technology, instruction, and assessment played a role for the students. Students weremotivated due to being heritage learners tended to want to learn about the language, but also the culture to be able to carry out traditions.

**Culture Defined:**

Definition of culture to what might be encountered in a FL class and particular aspects of culture seem to have been labeled for majors of the subject only. In the literature on culture in the FL field, a distinction is commonly made between high culture, also referred to as “C” (capital or big C), which includes architecture, art, history, literature, and music, and “c” (little c) which refers to everyday life, behavior, traditions, and the perspectives of the people in the culture of study. In FL education, “C” seemed to have been traditionally preferred over “c”, however, a shift from “C” to “c” has occurred with the influences from fields such as Anthropology and Sociology (Hall, 1990). Byram (1986) calls for the inclusion of all features within culture, including “C” and “c”. These definitions of culture and what culture entails supply the content that can be included in instruction, which tends to be very factual and not necessarily very interpretive, or so they seem too many beginning instructors. The Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21stCentury (National Standards, 1999) discuss culture in terms of products, practices, and perspectives (three P’s). Two of these three strands represent facts, however, the third strand (perspectives) allows for interpretive expansion. Going beyond the facts and interpreting cultural interaction is what IC tends to emphasize. Many definitions exist for IC; in Byram’s (1997) terms, IC is the willingness to consider and respect other beliefs and behaviors “and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging” (p. 34). Liddicoat et al. (2003) state “Intercultural language learning involves developing with learners and understanding of their own language(s) and culture(s) in relation to an additional language and culture.” (p. 46). The authors go further by maintaining, “It [intercultural language learning] is a dialogue that allows for reaching a common ground for negotiation to take place, and where variable points of view are recognised, mediated, and accepted” (p. 46). Learning and teaching FLs automatically include IC, yet how the “learning” and “teaching” of IC occurs and how it is mediated in the FL classroom is a question that requires more attention.

**In the classroom**  
Ways to develop this competence include learners producing a written or online guide to their own country and culture for visitors, reading and discussing guides written by visitors, researching aspects of a target culture in various media including cinema, literature and television, giving presentations on aspects of the target culture, and exploiting the teacher's own expertise of their own culture.

Below is a focus-group interview dealing with the definition of culture and intercultural learning in a study held for the purpose of what to teach in the classroom. A constant engagement with intercultural and cultural terms and ideas that the participants completed for this study illustrates that teachers need constant and continuous interaction and engagement with pedagogical topics such as culture and intercultural learning. The subjects’ uncertainty in defining the term culture and the shift from one concept to another demonstrates the complexity and difficulty of culture. Since the participants struggle with defining the term, it becomes apparent that their understanding of what or how culture *should* be taught might be unclear. To gain a deeper insight on the perception of teaching culture and what it entails in the classroom, the participants discussed various ideas and their understanding in the focus-group interview. An important moment occurred when asking what culture really is:

Justin: I don’t necessarily think that the culture would be the only pragmatics position of that, it would be limited to that, but I think **culture is already part of the language** to a certain extent.

[…]

Justin: So, teaching language and culture would also encompass being able to use language to engage within a culture?

Everybody: Right!

[…]

Justin: The transition is from **linguistic fluency** so to speak to a more **cultural fluency**.

Franc: Oh, but they **go hand-in-hand**. I mean you, in order to understand language, you need to understand the culture and you understand the cultures through the language.

[…]

Linda: Doesn’t it depend on how you **define culture**? Because it’s such a broad topic… (Focus group interview) [emphasis added]

This excerpt underscores the difficulty of defining culture and therefore having to decide what to teach in the classroom. Having the opportunity to discuss this phenomenon with each other, the participants attempt to make sense of the complexity that culture brings to their work .**Figure 1.** Questionnaire item on time of “culture taching

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