Intercultural competences for Foreign Language Teachers[1]

Alice van Kalsbeek

Teachers as well as students have many international contacts: students go abroad with exchange programs or for an internship and universities collaborate with foreign universities. 'Globalization' and 'internationalization' are dominating concepts these days. International mobility demands interculturally competent individuals who are able to move easily from one culture to another.

Interculturality has many aspects and if there is one location where all these aspects surface it is in the teaching practice of the foreign language teacher. "In the first place there is the teacher with his or her own cultural background and mother tongue. Secondly, there are the students who each have their own cultural baggage and their own level of language proficiency. Thirdly, the language to be taught is filled with references regarding culture. Lastly, the teaching materials are often written in a different country than that in which they are taught. Interculturally seen a complicated but interesting situation."[2] (Van Baalen e.a. 2003:12). This situation demands special competences from the foreign language teachers: not only do they need to be interculturally competent themselves, but they have to be able to coach their students in becoming global citizens.

1 Theory

There is no scientific theory or standard that prescribes the competences necessary for foreign language teachers. The best basis for composing a list of intercultural competences are the ideas on culture and intercultural communication. Sercu (2005:6) formulates it as follows: 'In sum, teachers of intercultural communicative competence also need to be acquainted with basic insights from cultural anthropology, culture learning theory and intercultural communication'. As this project focuses on competences for foreign language teachers, theories on foreign language learning and teaching have to be considered as well.

Main sources for formulating the underlying intercultural competences for foreign language teachers at British universities were the European Framework for Intercultural Competences[3] and the *Portfolio voor docenten*

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[1] This article is one of the results of a project 'Pilot for developing a course in intercultural competence for foreign language teachers', a co-production of the Steunpunt Nederlands als vreemde taal of the University of Amsterdam (Alice van Kalsbeek) and the University College of London (Gerdi Quist) in 2008.

[2] Original quote in Dutch: 'In de eerste plaats is daar de docent met zijn eigen culturele achtergrond en moedertaal. Daarnaast zijn er de studenten, ieder van hen met een eigen culturele bagage, en hun eigen niveau van taalvaardigheid. In de derde plaats is er de te onderwijzen taal die vol zit met verwijzingen naar de cultuur en ten slotte nog het (les)materiaal, dat soms in een ander land is geschreven dan waar het onderwijs plaatsvindt. Intercultureel gezien een gecompliceerde, maar interessante situatie.' (Van Baalen e.a. 2003:12).

[3] See for more information on Intercultural Competence Assessment (INCA): http://www.incaproject.org.

Nederlands als vreemde taal which was developed by the 'Steunpunt Nederlands als vreemde taal' [4] at the University of Amsterdam (Van Kalsbeek & Verbruggen 2007). Another source of inspiration were the meetings of the Flemish-Dutch Committee for Intercultural Competences (2006-2007) and the intercultural competences composed by Catteeuw for the Karel de Grote Hogeschool in Antwerp.

Byram, Zarate & Neuner (1997) distinguish between three levels of intercultural competence that correspond to the levels of the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) for language proficiency: Basic User, Independent User, Proficient User. In defining levels of language proficiency this distinction is worthwhile, but our opinion is that this distinction is not applicable in describing intercultural competences. Being interculturally competent is fluid, it is an attitude constantly changing under influence of situation and context (FitzGerald 2003). Therefore we do not distinguish levels in intercultural competences. We only define different aspects of each competence.

It is not only undesirable to distinguish between levels of intercultural competence, but they are also unsuitable and impossible to test for. Byram, Zarate & Neuner (1997) also indicate this in a addition to the competences by saying that the levels are meant for syllabus-construction, not for assessment. The argument that Byram e.a. give for not using intercultural competences in assessment, is that because of the interdisciplinary character of intercultural competences (anthropology, linguistics, sociology) the assessment should contain something that rises above the individual disciplines. While the assessment of language can be based on quantitative grounds, intercultural competence bases assessment on quality. Secondly, they argue that "to expect learners to model themselves on native speakers in socio-cultural competence is to misunderstand learners' social situation" (p. 9). Native speakers live within the target culture; they undergo that culture from the perspective of their values and beliefs. Foreign language learners perceive that same culture as an outsider, their perspective comes from another system of values and beliefs. So the point of reference for the foreign language-and-culture learner cannot be the near-native ideal of the language and culture. Not the foreign language and culture should be the point of reference, but the foreign language learner himself (Sercu 2005a).

Finally ethic and political aspects play a role in assessment: who is able to determine if someone else is interculturally competent?

The three key terms 'Openness', 'Knowledge' and 'Adaptability (Flexibility)', that Byram e.a.[5] use to describe the basics of intercultural competences, have been adopted by us. A fourth key term is 'Critical Awareness'.

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[4] The 'Centre for Dutch as a Foreign Language' developed the *Portfolio forTeachers of Dutch as a Foreign Language*.
[5] See for more information: http://www.incaproject.org.

Byram's intercultural competences are concerned with a general intercultural communicator. Additional competences are needed for foreign language teachers: not only should they be interculturally competent themselves, they also need to transmit these intercultural competences to their students. The didactic competences that convey this are based on the model by Van Kalsbeek (2003:91) which centers on the terms 'perspective', 'context' and 'dialogue'. The term 'dialogue' should be seen in the sense of 'creating a third culture' Kramsch (1993). Third culture arises from the communication between different cultural assumptions and/or discourse, when both communicators take some distance from their customary behavior from C1 respective C2. According to Kramsch people are cross-cultural communicators, when they are able to have an insider's and an outsider's view on C1 and C2.

2 Competences

We define 'competence' as adequately and integrated implementing (general) knowledge and skills in a professional context. We make a difference between the by Byram e.a. (1997) and Holliday e.a. (2004) inspired 'general competences' for the interculturally competent individual and 'profession oriented competences' for the foreign language teacher, which contain the ability to teach the competences and to turn their students into 'cultural beings'. Competences regard skills, knowledge and attitude. When integrating all these above mentioned fundamental terms, the following scheme is the result:

General	Openness	→	Attitude
	Knowledge	→	Knowledge
	Flexibility	→	Skills
Profession oriented	Perspective	→	Attitude
	Context	→	Knowledge
	Dialogue	→	Skills

Despite this schematic categorization and all utilized starting points, we should remember the statement on the website of Stanford University:

> 'And remember, your portfolio is not set in stone. The contents will change as your teaching experience and insight grow'.[6]

Flexibility is key. Nothing is so fluid as the discussion on (language and) culture and intercultural communications[7].

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[6] See website of Stanford University on: http://ctl.stanford.edu/.
[7] The *Portfolio for Teachers of Dutch as a Foreign Language* is available in an electronic open source way (http://portfolio.snvt.org) adaptable to the specific purposes of individuals or institutes.

2.1 General Competences

1. Openness	
I can develop an interest and gain an insight in other cultures.	I have a positive attitude toward the target culture and an open mind towards other cultures. I am aware of my role as an intermediary between two cultures. I'm able to put the norms, values and traditions of my own culture into perspective. I can recognize stereotypical judgments on other cultures and put them into perspective. I'm able to see people from other cultures as individuals, not only as representatives of their culture.
	I can make students aware of their own cultural baggage. I can stimulate students to have an open mind when regarding other cultures, and in particular when regarding the target culture (values and beliefs). I can learn students to be critical towards stereotypes.

2. Knowledge	
I have knowledge of the various ideas on culture and intercultural communication and can transmit these to my students.	I know that culture can be defined in different ways. I have knowledge of the different ideas on the relationship between language and culture. I have knowledge of different models of intercultural communication. I know the different interpretations of 'multi-cultural', 'cross-cultural' and 'trans-cultural'.
	I'm able to integrate my knowledge of culture and intercultural communication into my practice as a teacher. I can give students an insight into the various ideas on culture and intercultural communication. I pay attention in my teaching practice to the ways in which 'multi-cultural', 'cross-cultural', 'trans-cultural' and 'intercultural' play a role in the target culture.

3.Flexibility	
I am able to adopt appropriate behavior in various situations and guide my students to do so.	I am curious about new cultures. I easily venture into different (sub-)cultures. I am aware of the complexity of my own identity and that of the students. I can handle situations which are unexpected and unusual for me.
	I am aware of a growing diversity in the universities student population. I can teach groups of students to be sensitive towards and respectful of cultural differences. I can guide students on their international mobility. I can make students aware of their multiple identities.

2.2 Profession Oriented Competences

4. Perspective	
I am able to think and act from different perspectives and to apply the term 'perspective' in my teaching practice.	I can recognize the perspective from which a text is spoken or written. I am able to take the others perspective during intercultural communication.
	I am aware of the ethnocentric view of many classroom practices. I can make students aware of the cultural notions that are hidden in their actions and thoughts. I can teach students to analyze and recognize the various perspectives from which texts are produced in a foreign language.

5. Context	
I have sufficient knowledge of the target culture to add context to learning tasks and to instruct students searching for context.	I have a general knowledge of the geography, history, society and government of the target culture. I stay updated on political, artistic, literary, fashion and architectonic developments in the target culture. I know relevant sources (teaching materials, books, websites, television programs, etc.) in order to find information on the target culture. I am able to critically review and interpret sources from the target culture.
	I can connect language learning with acquiring intercultural competences in my teaching practice. I can teach my students to relate between text and context in the foreign language. I can teach my students to be critical of sources from the target culture.

6. Dialogue	
I know the basics and problems of intercultural communication and can implement this knowledge in the teaching practice.	I can communicate in the target language in specific situations with regard to the socio-cultural context (formal/informal, appropriate, politeness, avoiding sensitive subjects). I can analyze and solve problems that stem from intercultural miscommunication.
	I can show students and let them experience, the similarities and differences between their own culture and the target culture. I can problematize the difficulties of intercultural communication ('culture bumps') for students. I can stimulate the dialogue on cultural aspects between students and thus stimulate the creation of a 'third culture'.

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