Language Awareness, Intercultural Awareness and Communicative Language Teaching: Towards Language Education

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Abstract

This paper maintains that foreign language teaching does not only involve linguistic competence/performance and verbal communication but also it is much to do with intercultural awareness and intercultural skills: understanding how an identity and a culture are socially constructed and the abilities of discovery of “the other” (Pędich, Draghicescu, Issaiass and Šabec, 2003, p. 7). Also the goals behind learning a foreign language are not only a matter of acquiring that language but also helps learners acquire knowledge, culture, values and education that can be utilized in their life beyond the classroom, link them to their lives and take them back into their community; it aims at developing learners as intercultural speakers or mediators who are equipped with cultural background so that they can use the language efficiently in socially and culturally appropriate ways and who are able to “engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity” (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey, 2002, p. 5). Language education should also aim at “producing men who possess both culture and expert knowledge” (Whitehead, 1929, p. 1). In addition, learning and using languages is about citizenship and democracy (Guilherme, 2002): it is about “people coping with contexts of diversity and with mutable needs and aims” (Araújo e S’a and S’ilvia Melo, 2007, p. 7). The aim of this paper is to shed light on how Language Awareness (LA), Intercultural Awareness (IA) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) can help learners transfer culture, knowledge, values and education beyond the classroom to influence their way of thinking and consequently their view of life on the basis that a language educational system should inspire a student to understand, explore and think about the world around him/her through and besides learning that language. This paper also calls for a significant attention to intercultural communication in Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) and it stresses its increasingly important role in FLT in order to develop students’ intercultural communicative awareness and competence.

Keywords: Applied Linguistics; Culture and Language Teaching; Communicative Language Teaching; Intercultural Awareness; Intercultural Communicative Competence.
Introduction

Foreign language learning is comprised of several components, including grammatical competence, communicative competence, language proficiency, as well as a change in attitudes towards one’s own or another culture. For linguists and language teachers, cultural competence, i.e., the knowledge of the conventions, customs, beliefs, and systems of meaning of another country,” is indisputably an integral part of foreign language learning, and many teachers have seen it as their goal to incorporate the teaching of culture into the foreign language curriculum” (Thanasoulas, 2000, p. 5).

It has been widely recognized in the language teaching profession that learners need not just knowledge and skill in the grammar of a language but also the ability to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways. This was the major innovation of ‘communicative language teaching’. At the same time, the ‘communicative approach’ introduced changes in methods of teaching, the materials used, and the description of what is to be learnt and assessment of learning. On the other hand, The Council of Europe’s 'Common European Framework of Reference' together with these innovations also emphasizes the importance of 'intercultural awareness', 'intercultural skills', and 'existential competence' in foreign language teaching. These references highlight the importance of ‘Intercultural Dimension’ on the hope that “language learners who thus become 'intercultural speakers' will be successful not only in communicating information but also in developing a human relationship with people of other languages and cultures” (Byram et al., 2002, p. 4).

The recent trends in FLT - informed by the worldwide developments in matters of globalization, cross-cultural exchanges and the laws of international communication - are orientated towards an intercultural perspective which makes it so important to provide both students and foreign language learners with intercultural aspects and international experience (Longo, 2008). The claim is for an Intercultural Learning that would foster and help increase international and cross-cultural tolerance and understanding (Guilherm, 2002; Byram et al., 2002; Yassine, 2006; Ara’ujo e S’a and S’ílvia Melo, 2007; Jular, 2007; Agudelo, 2007; Longo, 2008 among others.)

Learning a foreign language is not simply mastering an object of academic study, but more appropriately focused on learning a means of communication; it is to enable learners to communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in a diverse and multicultural world. Communication can never be out of context and because culture is a part of context, communication is seldom culture-free. Thus, it is today increasingly acknowledged and recognized that in language learning, language and culture cannot be separable and culture teaching is an indispensable aspect in language teaching programs (Valdes, 1986; Kramsch, 1993). On the other hand, van Ek (1986) introduces a framework for comprehensive foreign language learning objectives, which can be developed in the context of this view of how FLT/SLT must be justified through its contribution to learners’ general education. He emphasizes that FLT/SLT is not just concerned with training in communication skills, but also
with the personal and social development of the learner as an individual. According to Robatjazi (2008) this framework “indicates reference to ‘social competence’, ‘the promotion of autonomy’, and ‘the development of social responsibility’, which are perhaps inherent in the original discussions of communicative competence, but certainly not central and explicit” (p. 249).

Communication which is the backbone of the FLT/SLT should not be understood as a mere exchange of communication and conveying a message, which has dominated communicative language teaching for years because the exchange of information; understanding how and what one says or writes, is always perceived and interpreted in cultural context. In this regard, Robatjazi (2008, p. 251) believes that communication, however successful it is, is not judged exclusively in terms of efficiency of information exchange but it is focused on establishing and maintaining relationships. Learning a foreign language is an intercultural experience because “it allows to know another language but above all to enter in contact with another reality” (Longo, 2008, p. 13).

Also, learning and using languages cannot be seen from a narrow pragmatic perspective (Guilherme, 2002). Language teaching is both a social and political activity (Byram, 2008); it is about “citizenship and democracy; it is about people coping with contexts of diversity and with mutable needs and aims” (Ara´ujo e S´a and S´ilvia Melo, 2007, p. 7). From this perspective, learning languages is to be involved with the development of learners’ critical, cultural and linguistic awareness, “hence to political education” (Byram, 1997, p. 35).

Dealing with FLT materials, the concept of culture, “interculturality” and culture awareness are of significant relevance taking into consideration the fact that language is a cultural phenomenon that is best understood and transmitted within the scope of the culture that shapes it (Yassine, 2006, p. 32); the language we actually use to communicate influences our beliefs and our view of life and consequently our culture and in fact our entire lives and most research shows that when people are exposed to another culture -mainly language exposure-, they start acquiring and learning something that goes beyond cultural knowledge (Byram and Feliming, 1998; Couper, 2001; Ara´ujo e S´a and S´ilvia Melo, 2007; Jular, 2007; Longo, 2008 among others).

When different communities and groups get involved in intercultural interaction, communication and tolerance are better acquired and promoted. This, in turn, helps in having more critical individuals who are able to review and change any negative attitudes or prejudices about other cultures, to observe, compare and see the world with a new perspective (Weaver, 1993; Couper, 2001; Ara´ujo e S´a and S´ilvia Melo 2007; Longo, 2008).

We believe that one of the main and most important responsibilities and objectives of FL teaching in schools and language teaching institutions is to establish an awareness of the values and significance of cultural practices in both learners’ own culture and the target language culture; they should be able to live with their own culture and the target culture. At this point, we emphasize what Robatjazi (2008) postulates stating, “what in effect proves critically needed and
crucial is that in any way possible, whether registered techniques or even innovative of the teachers themselves, the teachers and learners shall try to attain competence in intercultural communication through a language and its relationship to the cultural practices and identities interlocutors bring to an interaction” (p. 252). The foreign language teachers must have intercultural background that enables them to help students in the process acquiring the competence to critique (Longo, 2008, p. 13). It is also the task of foreign language teachers to make a foreign language teaching meet the needs of social and economic development in developing students’ intercultural communicative awareness especially in English because it has become the global language.

To sum up our introduction above, we see that Language Awareness (LA) and Intercultural Awareness (IA) are crucial in any foreign language education because they promote knowledge, understanding, tolerance, acceptance, acquiring new values and morals and fostering the existing ones as well as establishing positive attitudes among learners that in turn motivate them to learn foreign languages. This in turn can lead to fruitful and meaningful dialogue that can support mutual understanding among people from different cultural, ethnic and national backgrounds which consequently help people worldwide live in peace and harmony. This is the ultimate purpose behind learning foreign languages. In the following chapters we will shed light on the meaning, perception and importance of Language Awareness (LA), culture and Intercultural Awareness (IA) in foreign language teaching (FLT) and we consider them as very important components of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which have to be taken into consideration in learning a foreign language and in syllabus design.

Language Awareness

This chapter deals with language awareness (LA) as an important component of foreign language teaching. We try to explain the meaning, dimensions and role of LA in FLT and the role of the teacher and the learners in raising LA.

It has been generally accepted that LA has vitally an essential and a significant role to play in language education in spite of the fact that no one unified agreement exists as to its definition and scope. Garrett & James (2000) believe that LA is valid and important in the language learning context both for the mother tongue (MT) and for foreign languages (FL) with respect to three different domains: language learning, language teaching and language use... and it can benefit “five dimensions in language education: affective, social, power, cognitive and performance “(p. 330).

Language Awareness (LA) is an approach to language learning and teaching that has been increasingly discussed and applied - both within the LI (first language) and L2 (second/foreign language) context - during the past few years (Dufva, 1994; van Lier, 1995; Bolitho et al, 2003; Byram, 2006; Ara´ujo e S´a and S´ilvia Melo, 2007 among others). It has been especially outstanding in the United Kingdom, where it originated (see Hawkins, 1984). At present, several conferences have been held, and an academic journal called “Language Awareness” is regularly
published. Language Awareness (LA) is neither a methodology nor a theory of learning. Rather, it may be understood and looked upon as an umbrella for a wide range of approaches towards language and language teaching; language is something personal and meaningful where learners can discover it for themselves (Hawkins, 1984; Dufva, 1994; Byram et al., 2002; Bolitho et al., 2003; Jular, 2007; Robatjazi, 2008).

Hawkins (1984, pp. 4-5) sees LA as a process that involves challenging ‘pupils to ask questions about language’, encouraging learners ‘to gather their own data from the world outside school’, and helping learners to develop a ‘growing insights into the way language works to convey meaning’.

The (British) National Council for Language education (NCLE) defines LA as: “a person's sensitivity to and conscious perception of the nature of language and its role in human life” (as cited in James and Garrett, 1991, p. xi). In this, LA may be understood as “partly synonymous with reflectivity in matters of language/language learning, sensitivity to matters of language/language learning, and ability to explore language/language learning and appreciate it” (James and Garrett, 1991, p. xi). In this way students can be made aware of the similarities and differences between their own language and the foreign language they are learning and as James and Garret (1991) put it “they can be given means to reflect themselves as learners. They may be given tasks that develop their ability to deal with language analytically” (p. xi).

Dufva (1994) emphasizes the fact that LA activities in a foreign language programs are a combination of three interrelated and intermingling aspects; “language, interaction and culture”, (p. 23) in the sense that to regard social interaction is to regard culture. This means that if culture is taken, and actually it is, everyday behavior and everyday thought then it cannot be excluded from language teaching or LA programs. We have also to understand that culture entails external elements, such as observable manners, habits, customs or rituals, and internal aspects as well, such as notions, attitudes, beliefs and conceptual systems held by people living in this culture (see Holland and Quinn, 1987 and Dufva, 1994).

Alegre defines LA as “the ability to reflect on languages and to verbalize that reflection’, including pragmatic behavior and declarative knowledge” (as cited in Araújo e Sá and Sílvia Melo, 2007, p. 9). However, this view of LA follows ‘a more critical and meaning-orientated approach which stresses the role of language in the socio-cultural and political affairs of the people’ (van Lier, 1995, p.10). This means that those linguists are concerned with ‘linguistic etiquette’ (van Lier, 1995), but they put emphasis on the content (what is said) and the communicative process (how it is said), i.e. the meaning, its negotiation, its collaborative construction between different speakers of different languages and the “discursive space” that is given and negotiated within the interaction (Araújo e Sá and Sílvia Melo, 2007, p. 9). Among the many meanings associated with the concept of LA, “we should say that their view goes beyond a utilitarian definition and focuses on a “plurilingual” and intercultural perspective informed by European linguistic policies” (Araújo e Sá and Sílvia Melo, 2007, p. 18). As van Lier (1995) points out, “language awareness opens up new possibilities for language education in
schools, and avoids the extremes of prescribed correctness and utter neglect” (p. 9). In fact, the LA approach goes beyond the utilitarian view of (foreign) languages; FLs should be seen as living phenomena which, while to some extent shaping our lives and worlds, are also a set of resources which we ourselves can shape, and through which we can shape our own existence, identities and social lives (Byram et al, 2002; Byram, 2006; Ara´ujo e S´a and S´ilvia Melo, 2007).

To Bolitho et al. (2003) LA is “a mental attribute which develops through paying motivated attention to language in use, and which enables language learners to gradually gain insights into how languages work “(, p. 251) ; its objectives are to help learners to gain such insights. They also believe that LA is a pedagogical approach whose key element is that learners ‘discover language for themselves’. They also maintain that LA is developed by the learner and it is “an internal, gradual realization of the realities of language use” (p. 251). The term Critical Language Awareness (CLA) focuses on the “relationship between language and social context in which the awareness that might be developed includes awareness of the ways in which’ language represents the world, and reflects and constructs power relations” (p. 252).

The main objective of LA is to help learners to observe for themselves how language is usually used so that they can note the gaps and ‘achieve learning readiness’ (Tomilson, 1994, p. 122). Other objectives include helping learners to “ develop such cognitive skills as connecting, generalizing, and hypothesizing, and helping learners to become independent, with positive attitudes towards language, and to learning the language beyond the classroom” (Bolitho et al., 2003, p. 252). On the other hand, Critical Language Awareness (CLA) has additional objective of encouraging learners “to explore why the language they are learning may have come to be the way it is: what socio-political factors have shaped it” (Bolitho et al., 2003, p. 253).

James and Garrett (1991, p. 20) maintained by putting LA in practice in the classroom, teachers would take into consideration implicitly all theories and methods of learning and teaching, and all activities that make language more “accessible”, and more “alive” for a learner. In LA the focus is on language in use and in context where language is seen as a social and cultural medium. Language Awareness (LA) is often a learner’s learner-centered approach and essentially inductive and it “reflects the finding that, in both L1 and L2, language acquisition occurs when and only when the learners are ready “(Bolitho et al., 2003, p. 254). James and Garrett (1991) believe that in Language Awareness “the level of awareness is not stable, but can be both raised and focused and that this is done in an inductive manner” (, p. 20) and the aim of teaching is “to shape and increase conscious thought around a chosen aspect of language by offering the students such data that they are, for example, able to induce rules and regularities that underlie. In this process of becoming more aware, so it is optimistically argued, the level of language proficiency also increases (p. 20).

However, we believe it is crucial for language learners to realize and understand how language is actually used in everyday communication and interaction, what characteristic is in a given culture, and more important is how learners of a foreign language can transfer what they
learn inside the classroom into behavior and knowledge beyond or outside the classroom (i.e. their life at large) and even more than that is how they can think critically (Dufva, 1994; Byram et al., 2002; Jular, 2007; Robatjazi, 2008). We also believe that learning of languages is not a matter of language only; it is also a matter of issues of interaction and culture which are and should be integral elements of any language teaching. Therefore, it is not enough to make learners aware of language only but they have also to be made interactively and culturally aware. Thus, when the term LA is used, it has to be specified that not only awareness of language structure is involved, but awareness of language use as well.

On the other hand, LA programs should also encourage the view of language as a form of interaction taking into consideration not only its linguistic aspects and properties, but also pragmatic and social features in interaction, including nonverbal behavior. These features have to be observed and practiced in a foreign language classroom. To emphasize, communication cannot take place effectively in the absence of structure as Savignon (2002) points out “while involvement in communicative events is seen as central to language development, this involvement necessarily requires attention to form. Communication cannot take place in the absence of structure, or grammar, a set of shared assumptions about how language works, along with a willingness of participants to cooperate in the negotiation of meaning “ (p. 7).

This paper stresses the importance of LA in any FL language teaching / learning programs. We agree with Savignon (2002, p. 7) who maintained that effective language learning requires attention to form and with Richards (2006) who believes that “learners should also know how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions, how to produce different types of texts and how to maintain communication despite having limitation in one’s language knowledge”(p. 4). We also agree with Ekayati,(2007) who maintains that “linguists, teachers and learners have to be aware of the inter-relationship between language and society because it is in society that language has its existence” (p. 1). Finally , LA is one of the major components of both communicative competence (CC) and intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

Foreign language teachers need to be trained in Language Awareness programs and workshops so that they will be able to “analyze language , to apply different strategies about language in order to be able to plan lessons , to predict learners’ difficulties , to answer their questions and to write and evaluate materials” (Bolitho et al., 2003, p. 255). This entails a model of language education that this papers tries to call for, which promotes independent and critical thinking.

To sum up our discussion about the importance of LA in FLT, we believe that LA is important for learners of foreign languages to be involved in LA activities because once they do so, they will establish a personal relationship to language and accordingly their motivation to learn is increased and their interest is aroused by intellectual curiosity. Learners will also recognize the relationship between language and society; i.e. how language is used, how different groups use language and what attitudes they hold. James and Garrett (1991) also suggest that an improvement is possible in the cognitive domain when learners are linguistically
aware. “When the learner is guided to perceive ‘organizatory’ principles in language, to see units, categories, rules, patterns, and contrasts, he is shown at the same time new cognitive strategies and perhaps skills “(Dufva, 1994, p. 29). We also consider that LA can and should be studied and it can include both a foreign language and the learners’ native language where learners can explore the similarities and differences between the two languages recognizing that languages differ but may share common grammatical, syntactic or lexical features. Learners have to know the basic structure of language and to understand how it works and how to manipulate it.

Finally, we believe that LA is useful for everybody involved in language education: teachers, students and foreign language syllabus and curriculum designers as well as universities and language education training facilities. It is important to have an awareness of the diversity of language varieties students can bring with them as well as an awareness of the critical role language plays in communicating and understanding. Language awareness (LA) is fundamental to knowing who our learners are: In getting to know our students and how best to support their learning, we need to understand what language(s) they bring with them to class or school.

**Language Teaching and Culture**

The significance, value and importance of culture and cultural aspects in foreign language teaching have been extensively studied and considered by researchers (e.g. Ortuno, 1991; Brogger, 1992); Dufva, 1994; Martinez-Gibson, 1998; Byram and Fleming, 1998; Thanasoulas 2000 ; Alptekin, 2002 ; Skopinskaia, 2003; ; Calvo Cortes, 2007; Jular, 2007; Mai Hoa, 2007 among others). They all recognize the fact that communication is an interrelationship between a language and its people and if cultural aspects are not taught as a part of communicative competence, comprehensive and successful communication cannot properly take place. They also assert that culture has to be integrated into the teaching of all language skills in such a way that enables learners to speak and to write in a culturally appropriate ways; “culture teaching is one indispensable aspect in language teaching projects and culture and language cannot be understood separately” (Calvo Cortes, 2007, p. 230). In fact, language is a cultural phenomenon that is best understood and transmitted within the scope of the culture that shapes it.

In this regard, Brogger (1992, p. 10) points out that in order for one to understand a language, it is “increasingly important” to study the culture of that language and Calvo Cortes (2007, p. 231) also acknowledges explicitly the same fact stating that “in order to be able to understand thoroughly how a language works, it is crucial to be well known with its cultural background which includes, among other things, the customs, historical and geographical aspects, traditions, values and the people’s ways of thinking. Languages can have no meaning without culture taking into consideration the fact that languages are spoken by specific communities and they manifest specific structures to serve the needs of their communities. She also maintains that “language and culture are two interrelated concepts and they cannot really be understood separately “(p. 231).
Thanasoulas (2002) asserts that culture is “merely a repository of facts and experiences to which one can have recourse, if need be, and to learn a foreign language is not merely to learn how to communicate but also to discover how much leeway the target language allows learners to manipulate grammatical forms, sounds, and meanings, and to reflect upon, or even flout, socially accepted norms at work both in their own or the target culture” (p. 8). It is not possible to teach a foreign language effectively and successfully unless we offer insight and understanding into the speakers’ culture of that language. We can neither develop communicative competence, intercultural awareness nor intercultural communicative competence in a foreign language’s learners without taking into consideration the different views and attitudes of people in different cultures which may increase the success of communication or even hinder it. Furthermore, we have to be aware of the fact that teaching a language regardless of teaching the culture in which it functions, “we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning” (Politzer as cited in Thanasoulas, 2002, p. 9).

Because culture is important in foreign language teaching (e.g. Ortuno, 1991; Dufva, 1994; Martinez-Gibson, 1998; Kramsch, 1998; Alptekin, 2002; Lazar, 2003a and 2003b; Yassine, 2006; Calvo Cortes, 2007; Mai Hoa, 2007; among others), it is important to explain what it means. We see it as a concept that needs to be delimited because it has been interpreted differently by different people. It is often seen as a matter of only information conveyed by the language, not as an aspect of language itself. For instance, Kramsch (1998) conceives culture as “a membership in a discourse community that shares a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and action” (p. 127) while Goodenough suggests that: “a society’s culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for anyone of themselves” (as cited by Wadhaugh, 1992, p. 216). Rose sees culture as “a way of life, a set of social practices, a system of beliefs and a shared history or set of experiences” (as cited in Yassine, 2006, p. 31). What one can infer from those definitions is that for Kramsch and Goodenough culture is “acceptable interaction within the group it defines” and for Rose it is “what makes this group” (Yassine, 2006, p. 31). To the latter, culture is a way of life, a set of social practices, a system of beliefs and a shared history or set of experiences.

Furthermore, Dufva (1994) postulates “to regard social interaction is to regard culture” (p. 22). Culture, not necessarily in the sense of fine arts, but especially in the sense of everyday behavior and everyday thought cannot be excluded from language teaching or Language Awareness programs. In Dufva words “culture does not only involve external elements, such as observable manners, habits, customs or rituals, but also internal aspect as well, such as notions, attitudes, beliefs and conceptual systems held by people living in this culture” (p. 22).

This paper thinks of culture as ‘a complex system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviors, practices, ritual and lifestyle of the people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artifacts they produce and the institutions they create’. It is a dynamic, changing and developing process (Humphrey, 2002). We also believe that ‘knowledge of and engagement with the system of culture are fundamental to being able to communicate
successfully and provide a basis for the ways in which speakers of a language establish shared meanings and communicate shared concepts and ways of seeing the world’ (see Siboulet, 2005, p. 45) and understanding a foreign culture always entails a change of some of one’s attitudes. (see Wadhaugh, 1992; Dufva, 1994; Humphrey, 2002; Škopinska, 2003; Siboulet, 2005; Yassine 2006; Calvo Cortes 2007 among others).

On the other hand, we also believe that Intercultural language learning should include language, culture and learning mixed together into a single “educative approach”. It begins with the idea that language, culture and learning are basically mutually related concepts and this interrelationship is to be put at the heart of the learning process. Conducting intercultural language learning in the classroom means the fusing of these three elements into a single approach (Siboulet, 2005). Also “Culture is recognized as instrumental in shaping speakers’ communicative competence, in both their first and subsequent languages” (Berins, as cited in Savignon, 2002, p. 6) and language, interaction and culture are three interrelated and intermingling aspects that are central for language awareness activities in a foreign language classroom” (Dufva, 1994, p. 23). If we teach more cultural things in our classroom, we will not only promote and raise our students’ motivation for learning a foreign language but we will also promote and increase their cultural awareness so that their cultural prejudices and preconceptions can be reviewed and challenged. Also knowledge of culture can increase communicative competence and intercultural awareness; knowledge of other cultures can increase tolerance and lead to greater self-awareness and finally language and culture are so closely related that one cannot teach the one without the other (Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2002; Jular, 2007). We agree that the aim of teaching culture is ‘to increase students’ awareness and to develop their curiosity towards the target culture and their own, helping them to make comparisons among cultures’ (Tavares & Cavalcanti, 1996, p. 19). This means that foreign language culture enhances and supplements students ‘experience and makes them aware of cultural diversity. To emphasize, teaching culture and knowledge of culture will increase learners’ communicative competence, intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence; it will increase tolerance, acceptance and understanding and it will also lead to greater self awareness and finally language and culture are so closely related that one cannot teach the one without the other. Culture teaching is one indispensable and crucial aspect in foreign language teaching programs.

**Intercultural Awareness (IA)**

As mentioned in the previous chapters; it has been broadly acknowledged that language teaching is not only a matter of acquiring knowledge and skills in the grammar of a language, but it is also the ability to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways. This was the main principle of ‘communicative language teaching’. At the same time, the ‘communicative approach’ brought significant changes and innovations in methods of teaching, the materials used, the description of what is to be learnt and assessment of learning. (Canale and Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983a; Canale, 1983b; van Ek, 1986; Celce-Murcia, Dömyei and Thurrell, 1995; Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2002 Savignon, 2002 among others). The Council of Europe's 'Common European Framework of Reference' (Byram et al., 2002) incorporates these
innovations and also focuses on the importance of 'intercultural awareness', 'intercultural skills', and 'existential competence'. The 'Common European Framework' introduces the 'Intercultural Dimension' into the aims of language teaching. The essence of 'Intercultural Dimension' is “to help language learners to interact with speakers of other languages on equal terms, and to be aware of their own identities and those of their interlocutors. It is the hope that language learners who thus become 'intercultural speakers' will be successful not only in communicating information but also in developing a human relationship with people of other languages and cultures” (Byram et al., 2002, p. 5). This clearly manifests the recent trends in FLT, specifically Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to include and incorporate significantly, more than any time before, culture, Intercultural Awareness (IA), Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Intercultural Dimension as one of its main goals and principles (Byram, 1997; Byram and Zarate, 1997; Byram et al., 2002; Yassine, 2006; Araújo e Silva and Silva Melo, 2007 among others) taking into account the worldwide developments in matters of globalization, cross-cultural exchanges and the ‘laws of international communication’ which all consider that an intercultural perspective in LT and language education will support, empower and help increase international and cross-cultural tolerance, acceptance and understanding. The following section of this study tries to shed light on the meaning, definitions and features of Intercultural Communication (IC), Intercultural Awareness (IA) and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as the most recent dimension and development in CLT. The Intercultural Awareness (IA) is considered to be the core of this study.

The term “Intercultural Communication (IC)”, in general, refers to communication between people from different cultures (Damen, 1987; Samovar and Porter 1991; Samovar et al., 1997; Dodd, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Mai Hoa, 2007). More precisely, it refers to “symbolic exchange processes whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meaning in an interactive situation” (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 16). In the “symbolic exchange process”, people from cultural communities “encode and decode the verbal and nonverbal messages into comprehensive meanings” (Mai Hoa, 2007, p. 5). This definition evidently focuses on the influence of cultural differences and diversity on communication. It often happens that people of different cultural backgrounds face cultural difficulties and barriers when they try to communicate with each other to the extent that misunderstanding and communication breakdown take place. That is mostly due to the differences in their customs, traditions, and ways of life, their world view, social norms, religious practices and philosophy among other social cultural factors. One of the most effective ways to overcome these barriers, which this paper holds, is to introduce and teach culture in foreign language programs so that learners can be aware of, as much as possible, the culture of the language they are learning or studying. Nowadays, IC plays an important role in FLT because the goal of learning a FL shifts to enable learners to communicate their ideas and culture with speakers of other cultures worldwide. Consequently, the question of IC is clearly indispensable in foreign language learning and teaching if the aim is to develop students’ communicative competence, (see Mai Hoa, 2007, p. 5).
The term “Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)” is very much connected with recent principles and traditions in foreign language teaching, and it goes beyond the concept of communicative competence in significant ways. It has been generally defined by many researchers (Baxter, 1983; Krasnick, 1984; Kim, 1991; Meyer, 1991; Schnitzer, 1995; Byrnes, 1991; Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2001; among others) as the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language. More precisely, it is defined as “the overall internal capacity of an individual to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication” (Kim, 1991, p. 259), to the extent that a speaker is able to negotiate meaning efficiently and interact socially in such a way that s/he can use and adapt language appropriately in different cultural contexts. The challenging features of IC can be recognized as cultural differences, unfamiliarity, and incompatibility between the interlocutors. This means that successful communication cannot take place by simply acquiring a linguistic code; it is also by dealing with different cultural values reflected in language use. This lays out the philosophical base for a growing awareness that communicative competence should be conceived as intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Baxter, 1983), including not only “the knowledge of basic values and norms; verbal and nonverbal interactional competence in using a foreign language in intercultural communication; competence in using language as social action; competence in creating and interpreting linguistic aspects of social reality” (Krasnick, 1984, p. 218), but it also includes “the cognitive, affective, and behavioral adaptability of an individual’s internal system in all intercultural contexts “(Kim, 1991, p. 259). Learners of a foreign language who hope to carry out intercultural interactions effectively must be equipped with this set of abilities to be able to understand and deal with the dynamics of cultural differences because of the inseparable relationship between foreign language learning and intercultural communication.

Savignon (2002) also maintains that “participants in multicultural communication are sensitive not only to the cultural meanings attached to the language itself but to social conventions concerning language use, such things as taking turns, appropriateness of content, nonverbal language, and tone” (p. 10). She thinks that these ‘conventions’ influence the interpretation of the message and both ‘cultural sensitivity’ and ‘cultural knowledge’ are important in language teaching programs together with understanding, empathy and openness between and towards cultures. This paper agrees with her as she says “socio-cultural competence includes a willingness to engage in the active negotiation of meaning along with a willingness to suspend judgment and take into consideration the possibility of cultural differences in conventions of use.” She puts these terms under “cultural flexibility,” or “cultural awareness” as this paper tries to do.

To Fantini (2009) ICC is a complex phenomenon made up of several components:
1. A group of qualities which include: “flexibility, humor, patience, openness, interest, curiosity, empathy, tolerance for ambiguity, and suspending judgment, among others.”
2. The capacity “to establish and maintain relationships; to communicate with minimal loss or distortion and to collaborate in order to accomplish something of mutual interest or need.”
3. Four dimensions which he labeled as: “knowledge; (positive) attitudes; skills; and awareness.”

4. “Proficiency in a second language. Ability to communicate in a second or foreign language is important to the development of ICC.”

5. And four levels of a longitudinal and developmental process: “Educational Traveler’; ‘Sojourner’ or longer cultural immersion; ‘Professional’, i.e. Staff working in an intercultural or a multicultural context’, and finally the ‘Intercultural/multicultural Specialist’ level” (p. 1-2).

It is clear from the above definitions that ICC is associated with the concept of culture and communicative competence. Generally speaking, it is the ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one’s own (Byram, 2000, p. 297). It “involves awareness of different values, attitudes and behaviors of the ‘others’ as well as skills to deal with them in a non-judgmental way” (Skopinskaja, 2004, p. 2).

One can infer from the aforementioned definitions that it is not easy for learners of FLs to acquire complete and perfect ICC and the destination seems too far for teachers, syllabus designers and educators to attain such a goal because the task needs a lot of funding, international cooperation between different educational institutions worldwide. We also agree with Mai Hoa (2007, p. 8) who thinks that if a teacher wants to maximize students’ communicative effectiveness when interacting with members of other culture, the students should be also receiving cultural awareness training as an integral part of their foreign language courses taking into consideration that teaching or emphasizing cross-cultural awareness in a foreign language classroom is not an easy task. This is why this paper focuses on IA rather than ICC and considers it as a prerequisite stage to ICC. We believe that global teachers/students and learners exchange programs can best help in this and institutions like the British Council, and the Council of Europe, Fulbright Exchange programs, Liberal Arts universities and colleges are good examples on this.

It is worth to emphasize at this point that interculturality is best understood as a dynamic lively process of interchange, interaction and cooperation between cultures focusing on the similarities and taking into account the cultural variety and diversity as an inspiring and improving element. It promotes the coexistence between groups of people having different cultures or cultural background (Byram et al., 2002; Mai Hoa, 2007; Yassine, 2006). In terms of language teaching, interculturality allows for the development of the learners’ intercultural awareness, which is considered by recent pedagogy of great importance to successful learning (Byram et al., 2002; Lazar, 2003a; Lazar 2003b; Yassine, 2006; Agudelo, 2007; Korzilius, van Hoft and Planken, 2007; Mai Hoa, 2007; Longo, 2008).

Rose argues (as cited in Yassine, 2006, p. 33) that Intercultural Awareness (IA) can be seen as the process of becoming more aware of one’s own culture and others cultures and developing better understanding of them. Its main goal is to increase international and cross-cultural understanding. Though it is mainly a part of FLT/SLT, it has ‘exponents’ in all fields of
education. We believe it is an essential ‘prerequisite’ stage for developing intercultural communicative competence and it is a vital concept in an intercultural approach to foreign language teaching (Byram, 1997; Agudelo, 2007; Korzilius, et al., 2007) as we agree with Augdelo (2007:92) who believes that Intercultural Awareness is “a transversal axis in language teaching due to its implications. In other words, becoming conscious of our own cultural representations as well as those we use to identify others helps us see who we are in relation to the other”.

Korzilius et al., (2007) adopt the following definition of IA:

“Intercultural awareness is the ability to empathize and to decentre. More specifically, in a communication situation, it is the ability to take on the perspective(s) of (a) conversational partner(s) from another culture or with another nationality, and of their cultural background(s), and thus, to be able understand and take into consideration interlocutors’ different perspective(s) simultaneously” (p. 2).

Rose thinks that IA is a set of attitudes and skills that include the following:

“Observing, identifying and recording, comparing and contrasting, negotiating meaning, dealing with or tolerating ambiguity, effectively interpreting messages, limiting the possibility of misinterpretation, defending one’s own point of view while acknowledging the legitimacy of others and accepting difference” (as cited in Yassine, 2006, p.32).

Crawshaw sees IA,” as a competence, to be more than a set of knowledge about different and diverse cultures that language learners need to be proficient in. It is rather an attribute of personal outlook and behavior…it emerges as the central but diversely constituted core of integrated curriculum” (as cited in Yassin, 2006, p. 33).

Intercultural awareness, as defined by Byram et al. (2002) is “the process of becoming more aware of and developing better understanding of one’s own culture and others cultures all over the world to increase international and cross-cultural understanding” (p. 5). It is a new trend in foreign language teaching that takes into consideration the nature of social, cultural and pragmatic aspects of language. It has educational implications in the way that makes learners aware of their own culture and of the culture of the target language, and “learners are intercultural speakers or mediators who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity” (Byram et al., 2002, p. 5). This implies that the aims of language teaching should include both intercultural and linguistic competences; prepare students for interaction with people of other culture(s); enable them to understand and accept people from other culture(s) who have their own perspectives, values and behaviors; and help them to see that such interaction is an inspiring, enriching, educational and new experience (Byram et al., 2002, p. 6).
Knowledge, skills, attitudes and values involved in intercultural awareness

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC), according to Byram (1997) and Byram et al. (2002), requires certain attitudes, knowledge, and skills to be promoted, in addition to linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence. He proposed a model that consists of the following five factors or components:

1. The **attitude**, “savoir apprendre”, factor which refers to the ability to relativize one’s self and value others, and includes “curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own” (Byram, 1997, p. 91).

2. **Knowledge** of one’s self and others, “savoirs”, which means knowledge of the rules for individual and social interaction and consists of knowing social groups and their practices, both in one’s one culture and in the other culture.

3. The first skill set, the **skills of interpreting and relating**, “savoir comprendre” which describes an individual’s ability to interpret, explain, and relate events and documents from another culture to one’s own culture.

4. The second skill set, the **skills of discovery and interaction**, “savoir apprendre/ faire”, which allows the individual to acquire “new knowledge of culture and cultural practices,” including the ability to use existing knowledge, attitudes, and skills in cross-cultural interactions (Byram, 1997, p. 98). This factor includes a range of communication forms, including verbal and non-verbal modes and the development of linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competencies.

5. The last factor, **critical cultural awareness**, “savoir s'engager”, describes the ability to use perspectives, practices, and products in one’s own culture and in other cultures to make evaluations. It is ‘the ability to evaluate, critically on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own country and other cultures and countries (Byram et al., 2002:12) (see also Sincrope, Norris and Watanabe, 2007, pp. 5-6). Byram uses the French terminology because knowledge, skills and attitudes can be described as different ‘savoirs’.

Of these components we believe that the critical cultural awareness is an essential concept in an intercultural approach to language teaching (Agudelo, 2007, 92) as this paper tries to support. Byram (1997) also maintains that the FL classroom can offer enough opportunities for the acquisition of those skills; knowledge and attitudes mentioned above on the condition that it proceeds under the guidance of a teacher ( see Skopinska, 2003, p. 41).

This paper supports Byram et al (2002:7) who believe that the components of intercultural competence are those of knowledge, skills and attitudes mentioned above, which are to be complemented by the values one has because he/she belongs to a number of social groups and his/her values are part of one’s social identities. The bases of intercultural awareness and competence are seen and reflected in the attitudes of the intercultural speaker and mediator (Byram, 2008). This means that the intercultural speaker should not believe that his/her own values, beliefs and behaviors are the only possible and correct ones but he/she has to be able to see how the others, who have different values, beliefs and behaviors, perceive them. This Byram et al. (2002, p. 7) called the ability to 'decentre'. Students /intercultural speakers should also
respect the others’ values and have to accept their ways of acting and thinking without prejudice or discrimination because they make up an important component of the intercultural communication understanding and success. Students, in order to be successful intercultural communicators, have to develop attitudes that help them open to the others and be interested in their culture (Parmenter, 2003).

Accordingly, this paper stresses that a language educational system should inspire a student to understand, explore and think about the world around him/her through and besides learning a language whether it was foreign or native but especially a foreign language. Most of all, it should allow the student to experience the delight one can get from discovering knowledge at one’s own pace. This confidently can be done in language teaching classes with syllabuses and teachers who believe in language as a cultural phenomenon and who have enough intercultural awareness. Learning a foreign language should encourage, help and make learners “to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and [the ability] to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction”, i.e. skills of discovery and interaction (Byram et al., 2002, p. 16).

Furthermore, in Language education we do not only try to develop knowledge but we also try to develop, encourage and promote skills, transparency, comprehensiveness, coherence, attitudes, values and beliefs as well that can help lead learners /intercultural interlocutors to mutual understanding and cooperation regardless of their diverse and different social and cultural backgrounds and which ultimately helps people from different nations understand each other and live in peace and harmony. In addition to that, Byram et al. (2002) think “because intercultural speakers/mediators need to be able to see how misunderstandings can arise, and how they might be able to resolve them, they need the attitudes of “decentring” but also the skills of comparing” (8). They think that the skills of comparison, of interpreting and relating are very important in language education because these skills will enable learners from two or more cultures to put ideas “side by side and see how each might look from other perspective “and see how people misunderstand what is said or written due to their cultural difference (p. 8). In this way, learners discover not only the differences, but also the advantages and disadvantages of a new culture. If they compare and evaluate what they observe and study, they will be able to perceive differently and see the world with new eyes (Longo, 2008, 112).

On the other hand, Guilherme (2002) believes that learning and using languages cannot be seen from a narrow pragmatic perspective but it is about citizenship and democracy as well; it is about how people with different needs and goals deal with contexts of diversity. Pennycook (1994) thinks that teaching is a process of political engagement and the curriculum should be based on themes of social relevance to students. Byram (1997) also thinks that learning languages is to do with political education because it is related to the “development of learners’ critical, cultural and linguistic awareness” (p.35). It is worth to mention here that the concept of democracy in education was emphasized by John Dewey (1916, p. 230) more than a century ago who believed that democracy meant the opportunity and the ability to participate in the continuing conversation of the community, and to participate effectively, education must free the
intelligence to creatively reconstruct the community. According to him, the history of science is the history of a conversation of an international community. Logically, this is best done by creative and disciplined democratic classroom dialogue (Garrison and Lawwill, 1993, p. 29). Araújo e Sá and Sílvia Melo (2007) also believe that language education has political dimensions saying “as intercultural and plurilingual encounters are about awareness, interaction, mediation and negotiation, [we] consider plurilingualism and intercomprehension as political dimensions of a broad linguistic education” (p. 9). Pennycook (1994) goes farther and urges readers to think of educational institutions as "cultural and political arenas" (p. 299) in which different values are in struggle. On the other hand, Byram (2008) analyses the relationship between language learning and identity thinking that national languages, with their cognitive, affective and behavioral functions, are important for nation states, and the teaching of national languages is “an integral part of creating national identities’ and “developing an international identity“ (Byram, 2008, p. 123) and “. He adds saying that “there is a potential for foreign language teaching to have a role in identity formation… foreign language teachers could be assigned the role of promoting an international identity and a sense of belonging to international communities of interest, such as those developing in the wake of globalization” (p. 105). Accordingly, we also think, that there always exists a political dimension and implication in foreign language education.

Finally, intercultural speakers, language learners and mediators need, as mentioned above, a critical awareness of themselves and their values, as well as those of other people, (see Byram et al., 2002, p. 8ff). They also need to become aware of how with values influence their views of other people’s values. Learners of foreign languages can also learn and acquire, through learning/teaching activities, “the ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries”, i.e. critical cultural awareness (savoir s’engager) (p.16). Their role, with the advent of intercultural communicative approach, changes; they are no longer passive observers or imitators of target language speakers but rather are active participants in an exploration into the other and self.

The role of the language teacher is a supportive one, which is to provide learners with the means to understand their own culture and at the same time to learn to relate to the social world inhabited by their interlocutors. Language teachers have to introduce and develop skills, attitudes and awareness of values just as much as to develop knowledge of a particular culture or country by including terms and topics about human rights, equality, dignity; gender; bias; prejudice; stereotype; racism, ethnic minority and the names of ethnic groups ...etc. which can help learners talk about cultural diversity, (Byram et al., 2002, p.16). We emphasize the fact that "teachers need to see themselves as 'transformative intellectuals' rather than mere "classroom technicians employed to pass on a body of knowledge" and teachers can empower learners through a combination of approaches known as 'critical pedagogy', (Pennycook, 1994, p. 299). Comprehensiveness, coherence and transparency (Foreign Language Council of Europe, 1993) as well as precision play a great role in developing intercultural communicative awareness and competence among learners (Robatjazi, 2008, p. 252) which can be introduced and developed by language teachers. Language teachers have “the responsibility to help students consider different
world views so that a dialogue can be established between different realities and knowledge” (Agudelo, 2007, 202). It is evident from the above mentioned discussion that the role of the language teacher is crucial in helping students to develop linguistic and intercultural awareness as he/she can help learners talk, write, read and discuss topics dealing with human rights, politics among many other topics as mentioned above.

To conclude our above discussion, IA is connected with the concepts of culture and communicative competence. It goes beyond the learning and teaching of linguistic codes to a broader area of intercultural education where language is seen as essential for effective communication (Li and Li, 2004, p. 33). Intercultural Awareness is the ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one’s own (Byram, 2000, p. 297). The term intercultural implies a restructuring of one’s own attitudes and world view (Seelye, 1994, p. 21). In other words, Intercultural Awareness involves awareness of different values, attitudes and behaviors of the ‘others’, as well as skills to deal with them in a non-judgmental way. It requires that students acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and critical culture awareness to communicate interculturally, (Parmenter, 2003, p. 20). Intercultural language learning is not simply a method of embedding language, culture and learning, but rather an overall orientation, a way of thinking and doing, a stance and overall perspective which influences all decisions regarding curriculum (Asian Education Foundation, 2005, p. 6). In terms of FL classroom practice Intercultural Awareness refers to activities connected with behavior and speech patterns, such as appropriate choices for conversation topics, opening and closing a conversation, criticizing and complaining, stereotyping, reacting to culture shock, personal space restrictions and non-verbal communication.

The communicative language teaching is the methodology to be used in achieving the aims of this paper (i.e. raising linguistic awareness and intercultural awareness) because communication, culture and interculturality are related to each other and it carries out the quality of education in foreign language teaching (Jin, 2008, p. 81). The intercultural approach cannot be seen as an approach outside the umbrella of the communicative language teaching; it is a division of the communicative language teaching like other divisions and it plays a role in communicative skills where students need to construct and keep interpersonal relations in different social situations (Longo, 2008). The intercultural approach aims at giving learners both intercultural awareness and linguistic awareness with competencies as learners need linguistic knowledge and skills as well as the ability to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways. It can also prepare learners to interact with people of other cultures and enable them to understand and accept each other as individuals with distinctive perspectives, values and behaviors (Chlopek, 2008). The intercultural approach involves an understanding of the social context in which language is used, which is one of the main and most important principles of the communicative language teaching; it is the culture specific context where values, norms, beliefs and behavior patterns of a culture are taken into consideration (Sarem and Qasimi, 2010).
Conclusion

Both intercultural awareness (IA) and linguistic awareness (LA) are crucial and vital in foreign language teaching if one wants to learn and understand a language properly and appropriately, and they should be included in an intercultural communicative approach to foreign language teaching. There is a need to raise cultural awareness about both the target culture and the learners’ own culture. Learning a Foreign Language is an intercultural experience “because it allows to know another language but above all to enter in contact with another reality” (Longo, 2008, p. 113).

The prime aim of foreign language teaching should enable learners to communicate effectively with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in a diverse and multicultural world. This requires new methodological approaches that can provide learners with the means and ways of accessing and analyzing a wide range of cultural practices and meanings; can help learners develop understanding of the processes involved when interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Humphrey, 2002); can promote and develop critical and creative thinking, mutual understanding, tolerance, acceptance, human rights, democracy and prepare learners to cope with and face life at large outside and beyond the classroom; those learners who are equipped with knowledge about their own culture and the target culture. Foreign language teachers should be trained in language education programs that afford not only linguistic expertise (skills, knowledge and proficiency) in the structural aspects of the language, but also in the appropriate usage of language in diverse socio-cultural contexts, and to be enrolled in workshops dealing with general cultural issues, anthropology and human rights aspects. Teachers, before learners, must have intercultural communicative awareness and competence so that they will be able to teach and raise both linguistic and intercultural awareness in foreign languages classes effectively and competently. Learning foreign languages must be linked to the lives of the students; it should go beyond the classroom in order to be able to inquire into their worlds; to interact and cope with life at large confidently.
References


Council of Europe Modern Languages Division website: http://culture.coe.fr/lang.


