TOWARDS INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN EUROPE

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1. Introduction

One recurring worldwide conflict is the fight between maintaining nationalism and the need for international exchange. The clash of nationalities, cultures and religions has turned Europe into one of the battlefields of a multilingual and multicultural society bound to look for a peaceful solution. Developed out of the Latin majority culture of the Middle Ages, Europe has become a system of different cultures. Each culture has evolved in an autonomous way, though always in close contact with neighbouring ones.

In this context, from an anthropological and historical point of view, the concept of culture is understood as consisting of:

- a society organized in certain social institutions;
- a civilization with its own products and artefacts;
- a mentality resulting from a system of conventions, norms and beliefs (Posner 1993: 2).

The growth of these three components of a national culture has been promoted – though not simultaneously – in different European countries.

The tendency towards a national culture first emerged in Spain, England, France and the Netherlands serving as models for the rest of Europe. After the French revolution the main political motive became the creation of a territorial state, a national industry and a specific mentality for each culture. But this evolution of politically different national states constrained economic expansion and ultimately led to imperialism: the economic exploitation and political subjugation of overseas colonies. Such imperialistic policy ended in the disaster of the two World Wars, whose outcome has urged the need for a peaceful solution in Europe.

In this climate, the re-emergence of industrial development and fierce international competition has created supranational structures, such as multinational companies and supranational institutions. Economic growth and expansion, at the same time, enhance the need for communication and cultural exchange. The new-born industries of language in particular are acquiring an increasing economic and industrial importance. These industries of language have a major function in those multilingual communities besieged by problems of political, economic and cultural integration.

The efforts made by the European Council to promote multilingual technologies and the work of the Commission of the EEC have been translated into the project LIFE (Language Industry for Europe). Among its main tasks this project aims at drawing up an inventory of research and industrial groups, of lexical, linguistic and information resources in order to stimulate teaching programmes and professional training. One of the main problems this project has to face, though, lies in the cultural changes that have to be taken into account in text interpretation, changes that affect the correct use of languages. This obstacle that arises in the transmission of interlinguistic information by means of automatic translation draws the focus of attention to the inseparable nature of language and culture.

In spite of the economic and even political commitment to general progress, the third component of each culture – mentality – did not parallel this evolution. The fear of losing a common ethnic identity, traditions, values and beliefs threatens the establishment of a politically and ideologically united Europe.

The project of a common European culture will not become reality until the anxiety about losing our system of conventions is done away with. The belief of our identity "glued" to a specific nationality, way of life (culture) and way of expression (language) hinders any attempt to educate a multilingual and culturally open-minded youth.

One of the striking features of the increased demand for FL teaching which has followed political change in East and Central Europe has been its simultaneous emphasis on both the functional and cultural load of each language. At the same time, across Europe there is an eagerness to reinvest in cultural exchange which multilingual education could facilitate.

These positive aspects, however, are somehow shadowed by the influence of three factors:

a)   a general rejection of change,
b)   a superior position of those who speak the 'majority' languages, and
c)   neo-nationalisitic movements brought to force by ethnolinguistic identification,[1] which undermine the efforts undertaken by the European com-

munity to promote a network of pedagogic and research interchange among the different cultures and languages. It is still feared that supranational policies will favour certain majority cultures that might swallow our identity as citizens of a specific state or members of a specific culture. We must not forget that though imperialism seems to be politically fading out, it still remains in some nationalistic headquaters.

It is within this context that we need to see the specific case of language teaching and of English language teaching in particular. For those speakers of a non-majority language the question of language teaching becomes a highly political issue as it is always ultimately associated with cultural and social power. This is particularly true when the second language happens to be the language of the dominant political economic systems of the modern world. If the teaching of any language can provoke a sense of alienation from other cultures and xenophobic feelings, the teaching of high-status languages referable to cultural empires can result in ideological colonisation. If our native language is the material from which our thoughts are constructed, in learning subsequent languages we must beware of cultural imperialism and even more so when teaching them.

2. Imperialism in the second language classroom: attitudes and acculturation

Cultures are undeniably different in several respects, and yet the fact of difference, the fact of existence is simply not related to the question of worth and value. From this point of view, it has been argued that fears of cultural imperialism among teachers of English as a second language are unfounded. However, when anthropologists try to assess the equal worth of all cultures, some cultures are considered to be superior to others. It will be sufficient to point out that in an essay on "Culture, Values and the Language Classroom" we come across statements of the type that: "there are grounds for associating the richness and diversity of a language with superiority in terms of providing a true perspective, ... English, on these terms, is a relatively powerful language" (Barrow 1990: 9). While it is conceded that to teach English may involve introducing certain patterns of thoughts and values to students, what is introduced is considered desirable and even "superior" to other alternatives. Imperial cultures have always had fake linguistic claims made for their pre-eminence. In some cases it is understood that what is implicit in the English language may represent a better or truer way of understanding the world than is represented in certain other languages (Edwards 1985, Barrow 1990). What is actually taught, of course, is and was 'cultural imperiousness'.

This attitude of superiority derives from the argument that language and thought are so closely linked, that particular communities may vary in what

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[1] The characteristics and consequences of ethnolinguistic identification have been defined by applying the principles of the Speech-Accomodation Theory (SAT) to the Ethnolinguistic Theory (Beebe – Giles 1984).

they think worth reasoning about and, as a consequence, fail to develop a language for reasoning about certain things. The argument goes even further, implying that this lack of linguistic aspects will inhibit and restrict the changes of developed or refined thought, a specific way of interpreting the notion of linguistic relativity.

In the opinion of Humboldt, who developed the theory of linguistic relativity, language shapes the "Weltanschauung" of its speakers, constraining our perception, our mental processes and the organized knowledge of the outer world.

In synthesis we can deduce four essential points from this theory:

1. the structure of language constrains mental and perceptual processes,
2. the structures of languages are different,
3. the differences between languages are stable and not subject to individual changes,
4. the existence of different world-views is due to differences in the structures of languages.

As a consequence of this perspective on language-thought and context we all tend to identify ourselves with our mother tongue, rejecting other means of expression and ways of thinking. Here the main obstacle for cross-cultural understanding is expressed in ethnic identity and world view limited by our mother tongue. The reluctance to lose one's identity is directly linked to ethnic consciousness and linguistic-cultural adherence. There may be cultures whose language is so different that in teaching them a foreign language, their world view becomes literally shattered.

Therefore, it is important to keep in mind how anxiety is produced by such constraining attitudes. To address the problem directly: It is feared that steps taken to modify or alter the cultural perspective of an individual or a group convey the superiority of the imposing culture as well as the emergence of unfavourable attitudes on the part of the students. From this perspective we will focus on the problems arising from identity conflicts in foreign language acquisition.

Bound to their linguistic and cultural origins students may try to prevent the feelings of anxiety by devaluing any foreign culture, approaching it with prejudices, judgements based on stereotypes, inadequate information and ethnocentrism. Since linguistic and cultural adaptation involves the acceptance of different norms of behaviour, students must establish a new set of linguistic and non-linguistic patterns. Faced with this experience students may even suffer a culture shock, described by psycholinguists (Brown 1986) as an identity crisis with feelings of anxiety and rejection. Thus, negative attitudes emerge from the fear of losing one's identity and are translated into stereotyped ideas about the target culture.

Usually these negative attitudes also become part of the acculturation process described by Hanvey (1975). During the first two stages, students approach a different language and culture in a stereotyped, superficial manner. An increase in their experience of the foreign culture may lead to the afore mentioned cultural shock. In the process of becoming aware of the foreign expressions, students feel frustrated with their own inability to adapt. They have to face foreign norms and values that challenge their own, whose validity has never been put into doubt, arousing feelings of hostility towards the speakers and the foreign culture they feel unable to cope with.

The "Acculturation model" presented by Schumann (1975) takes into account psychological constraints as well as social distance in the students' linguistic and cultural integration. According to several researchers (Young – Gardner 1990) acculturation is part of an individual's cognitive and affective development. This means that students have to overcome the psychological and social distance with respect to the SL community in order to acculturate. Mantle-Bromley (1992) defines social distance as a measure of the degree to which societies allow or inhibit interchange. Related to the concept of "linguistic relativity", the students' desire for preservation and enclosure in their own culture will obviously increase the factor of social distance and simultaneously decrease the likelihood of successful linguistic and cultural acquisition.

2.1. Models of Cultural Adaptation

Anderson (1994: 298-299) analyses four models describing the process of adapting to another culture:

1. In the so-called "recuperation" model, culture shock is portrayed as an affliction, a medical condition from which the individual might recover. Within this view, Adler (1975, 1987) among others, construed the cultural adaptation process as a powerful developmental experience. The culture crisis provides the impetus which opens up the way to personality development and growth.
2. Another perspective of cross-cultural adaptation is that of a learning process. To adapt, students must learn the parameters of a new sociocultural system. Two schools of thought discuss this type of cultural accommodation; the first, encompassing communication theorists, considers intercultural communication as the core of adaptation whereas the second postulates that adaptation lies in implementing appropriate social behaviour with emphasis on behavioural learning itself.
3. Cultural adaptation has also been viewed as a process of recovery and learning, a step-by-step psychological journey from the fringes to the center of a foreign culture (Gordon 1971).

4. Finally, Wong-Rieger (1984: 157) among others, proposed the term "homeostatic mechanism" for the adaptation process, considering it a dynamic and cyclical process of tension reduction.

However, these models, individually considered, are not fully satisfactory in accounting for the process of adaptation. The homeostatic model tends to be reductionist and one-dimensional: the individual seems to be more concerned with adapting to internal tension than to the external environment. The journey description contains interesting insights into the cognitive and perceptual dimensions but remains purely descriptive, neglecting the dynamics of the process. The learning models correctly assume that the individual must learn the parameters of the new environment, but the process of adaptation also requires an affective acceptation, which does not respond to mere cognitive learning.

For the individual faced with the task of adapting to a new environment any cross-cultural trials would be more tolerable, if they could be connected to previous life experiences. Life in general means having to cope with disruptive events, such as a divorce, unemployment or the death of someone familiar. In essence, cultural adaptation is just another process of living an adjustive crisis. Anderson (1994: 303) links the process of adaptation to the roots of sociopsychological adjustment and presents a model to account for this connection and applies it to the findings of decades of cross-cultural research. In synthesis, the model combines the afore mentioned four approaches and contains six basic principles:

- it involves social and psychological adjustments
- it implies learning
- it implies a stranger-host relationship
- it is cyclical, continuous and interactive
- it is relative; and
- it implies personal development.

These principles have been modified and re-ordered subsquently according to an interdisciplinary approach that will be discussed for the foreign language classroom:

- it involves psychological adjustments
- it is relative
- it implies learning
- it is cyclical and continuous
- it implies social and interactive adjustments
- it implies personal development

These tenets will also be applied to the diverse steps required for a favourable adaptation process. But before dealing with each of these aspects in detail, it seems necessary to introduce the notion of intercultural competence, a concept that entails the learning of the language, as well as its use in accordance with the cultural context and the adaptation of non-verbal behaviour. Taylor (1994: 400) distinguishes two views in the process of intercultural competence: a) that of a problem approach to understanding a strangers's transition into a new culture, and b) the learning growth approach. The conceptual framework of the latter is a positive view of change in the intercultural experience. Several researchers, Adler (1975), Bennett (1986) and others, have illustrated vividly the changes that take place in becoming interculturally competent, but these changes only imply that learning takes place. In short, intercultural competence should be the outcome of a positive adaptation process.

The emphasis on cultural adaptation as a learning process projected towards the movement of personality and identity to a new consciousness of values, attitudes and understanding, will be the major reason – discussed later in more detail – for including intercultural education in the FL classroom.

We may then conclude from this survey that a) cultural imperialism will foster unfavourable attitudes in language students, b) the role of attitudes and acculturation deeply affects the teaching of a foreign language and its culture, and c) that the process of cultural adaptation can be closely linked to the learning of a foreign language. These are two aspects language teachers are bound to keep in mind throughout the whole teaching process, since language teaching is always loaded with cultural content.

3. Cultural messages and FLT re-orientation

When it comes to teaching a language, ultimately one teaches the distinctions that are recognised by and important to those who normally speak the language; one teaches types and ways of reasoning, and one, more indirectly but more specifically, promotes particular substantive values through the material used. By teaching a foreign language teachers do indeed transmit particular values and beliefs, which to some extent is inevitable. Whatever one might feel about the intrinsic nature of foreign language teaching, in the process of attempting to educate, teachers may quite unintentionally convey repressive, authoritarian messages.

In this context it is worth attending to the matter of social relations and, in particular, *power* relations. The teacher is in possession of knowledge which the learner lacks, a knowledge that necessarily defines the social relation between them. The currency of the knowledge/ignorance duality reflects the reality of the foreign language classroom, the asymmetrical interaction of novice and expert. Any interaction sequences in the FL classroom implicitly convey cultural messages. From this point of view, Poole (1992: 94) argues that "all language learning is culture learning". Hence, the attention to cultural issues is necessary for the full understanding of FL classroom processes.

However, in so far as this aspect prevents imperialistic tendencies, it is not negative, but a starting point for educating young people for cultural understanding. Since it is not possible or desirable to avoid foreign language teaching being pervaded by underlying cultural messages, language teachers should fulfil two requirements: a) to avoid any hint at the supposed superiority of the target culture and b) to prepare their students for cultural tolerance. In spite of surface differences, the concept of culture either implicit or explicit has been predominantly monocultural and ethnocentric in most FL teaching methods and materials, until recently.

3.1. Methodological aproaches

Our suggestion is that a re-orientation of FL teaching should involve the following aspects:

- a psychological approach, taking into account attitude change and sensitivity,
- a relativistic approach, implying a diverse focus on the concept of culture,
- socialization in the FL classroom.

This change of perspective within FL teaching will be applied to recent findings in cross-cultural research and implies an interdisciplinary approach. We will also see how the six principles of the adaptation model can be integrated in those approaches discussed above. Obviously, the combination of these three methodological approaches will also affect the choice of content and material.

In the case of the psychological approach, recent studies in cross-cultural research (Seelye 1987; Byram 1989, 1991) suggest a psychological preparation that will enable students to assimilate cultural knowledge. Mantle-Bromley (1992: 121) emphasizes the need for readiness and self-awareness as two essential stages through which students' psychological disposition towards the foreign culture will be improved. Even though students are introduced to the information about the target culture, this information will not be converted into knowledge unless it has been selected according to the following criteria:

a)   the development of cultural consciousness in our students
b)   the relativity of cultural values
c)   paralellism between cultures
d)   the critical integration in the process of cultural adaptation.

In this sense the contribution of cross-cultural research has been an important step towards the psychological formation of students. Any culture learning programme recognizes the need for psychological preparation, for starting with an awareness of one's own behaviours and proceeding from there through an ex-amination of foreign behaviours. Self-awareness can be awakened and furthered by means of the analysis of behaviour. First, students will be guided to distinguish between individual and cultural behaviour. Once they are aware of this difference, they will also be able to discover the impact culture has on their way of thinking, feeling and living. This discovery will reveal how they as individuals are subject to the norms, values, conventions and beliefs of their native culture. The awareness of the cultural influence on their every-day life will lead to their psychological distance towards their environment. For the first time they will be aware that their way of being and their nationality are not necessarily identical nor inseparable. Thus, students will distance themselves from being "Spanish" or "English" and adopt a critical attitude towards ethnolinguistic identification. Therefore, self-awareness must serve as the core of a programme designed for attitude readiness. This first stage corresponds to the first principle of psychological adjustment in the adaptation model.

The relativistic approach aims at conveying the relativity of cultural values to the foreign language learner. From their position of inferiority as learners, students may still tend to reject the cultural load inherent to the foreign language. The major obstacle in applying principles of cultural understanding lies in the assumption of the exclusive validity of one's own culture, that is, the students' rejection of the imposition of a different culture to their own. It is only possible to effect a change in unfavourable attitudes and anxiety by guiding students towards appreciating the similarities of values between their own and the foreign culture. The concept of cultural relativity, proposed by Seelye (1987), implies the development of cultural sensitivity based on a process of relativization in order to a) make students aware of their own culture, b) draw parallelisms with the foreign culture, c) assess both cultures with relative criteria.

As students learn to understand how culture both guides and limits their behaviours, they will be more willing to accept another culture as an alternative instead of a contradictory view of reality. The progress students make towards cultural awareness is contingent on their readiness to adopt a critical point of view which will allow them to consider themselves within their cultural context from a certain psychological distance. Before students can realistically observe the behaviour of others without prejudice, they must become aware of their own culturally restricted behaviour. Since all learners' interpretations of cultural expression will necessarily depend to a great degree on their previous experience, they need to acknowledge their own beliefs and behaviour in order to progress towards tolerance of cultural variety. This critical attitude will emerge from their awareness that each culture entails a range of values and options to satisfy the psychological and physical needs of their members.

In studying another culture the learner will and must learn about himself in the process. Once students are able to accept the relative validity of any culture,

they might also understand that our perception and criteria are influenced by our social, ethnic and moral upbringing so that, in the words of Ortega y Gasset: "Yo soy yo y mis circunstancias" (I am myself and my circumstances).

Hence, the achievement of cultural relativity is mainly based on the awareness of cultural constraints and in overcoming these limitations in an attempt to open students' minds towards the tolerance of cultural otherness.

The second step in this process of relativization should provide students with cultural information about foreign norms of behaviour and values similar to their own, so that they start to experience the validity of both cultures for their members. This stage covers the principles of relativization and of learning about the target culture. Critical integration within the process of cross-cultural acceptance becomes – from this relativistic approach – the starting point of any programme of foreign language teaching.

The preparation of the third approach to language socialization is partially given in the two previous stages, but we will discuss it more thoroughly, so that it will be dealt with in a separate section. We must point out though, that none of the processes of psychological readiness, relativization or socialization can phase out at a certain level. Each process is nurtured by and complements the others, and the whole development must be understood as cyclical and continuous.

4. Language socialization and intercultural education

As we have mentioned before, in foreign language learning, students internalize a different language as the expression of a different culture. Any foreign language context includes cultural dimensions that necessarily affect both the teaching and learning processes. Thus, the most immediate concern of FL teaching is the definition of the content and cultural intent of language teaching, with implications for materials, teacher development and language education policy. From this perspective, the foreign language classroom is being considered the ideal place for introducing intercultural education (Buttjes 1991, Byram 1989).

The didactic core of intercultural education has been drawn from the field of sociological research. It consists of "language socialization" and "tertiary socialization". Within the process of socialization in the foreign language classroom, Poole (1992) distinguishes between the socialization to use a language and socialization through the language. The first one concerns interactional sequences in which learners are guided to use a language in specific contexts whereas socialization through language refers to the use of the language to convey and transfer cultural meaning. Both processes rely on the interdependence of language and culture learning.

At the same time, socialization in the second language classroom aims at the development of the learners' self-awareness as well as their tolerance of other individuals, no matter what nationality they identify with or what language they speak. In order to achieve this major goal, language socialization must be followed by tertiary socialization.

The notion of tertiary socialization means the expansion of the socialization processes each individual living in a society has to go through. The process of socialization involves the acquisition of social norms and the individual's adaptation to conventions of family life (primary socialization) and of life within a specific society (secondary socialization). Thus, tertiary socialization would be the third step in the individual's social education. Considering socialization as a lifelong process, starting with integration into a family and continuing at school, work etc., tertiary socialization would be the widening of the individual's social horizon from a monocultural towards a multicultural society.

Combined with language socialization, tertiary socialization of second language learners will result in intercultural communicative competence. Proficiency in a foreign language is the first requirement for communication, which is the starting point for intercultural understanding. Both foreign language learning and tertiary socialization aim at the development of aspects that are most important in the learners' intercultural education such as cognitive socialization, aesthetic socialization and socialization as the acquisition of performance competence.

These sociological goals will enrich foreign language teaching, serving as the determinant criteria for the content of interaction and the choice of material presented in the language classroom. This methodological stage comprehends the principles of social adjustment and of interaction, as well as it contributes to the personal development of the students. Byram (1989) presents a model where second language learning and the adaptation to the foreign culture are perfectly matched. The interaction of the three approaches – psychological, relativistic and socialization – should result in a favourable process of adaptation as soon as adaptation is framed within an adequate learning theory.

Since the process of adaptation parallels the process of learning a foreign language and culture, both can be furthered by the application of a learning theory. Understanding the learning process is essential in developing more effective educational programmes and identifying factors that can aid students during their intercultural experience. The field of adult education offers the transformational learning theory that could act as a model for this process. Taylor (1994) suggests the connection of the transformational learning theory to the learning process of intercultural competence on three dimensions:

– the precondition to change, motivated by the psychological preparation of the students,
– the process of learning consisting of phases, whereby students evolve from a lower to a higher level of intercultural competence,

– the outcome dimension which reflects a change in meaning perspectives and involves cognitive, affective and behavioural changes.

When task-oriented problem-solving learning and communicative learning involve reflective assessment of premises and movement through cognitive structures by identifying and judging presuppositions, transformational learning is taking place.

The precondition to change will be given by the psychological readiness and self-awareness. The process of intercultural and transformational learning will be favoured by guiding students through the diverse stages of socialization. Finally, the outcome of intercultural competence coincides with the major goal of intercultural education.

From this perspective we assign intercultural education the major objective of developing tolerance and cultural understanding in our students. In order to direct the cognitve and affective processes involved in the development of intercultural competence and cultural adaptation, the following goals must be achieved:

– lack of ethnocentricity;
– cognitive flexibility;
– behavioural flexibility;
– cultural knowledge;
– interpersonal sensitivity (Thomas 1989).

These goals also constitute the main guidelines for intercultural education. Taking into account the psychological preparation of students as well as the link to transformational learning, we can conclude that intercultural education in foreign language teaching has to combine the following characteristics:

1. Intercultural education, like any pedagogical issue/task, must be shaped according to the goals pursued and the needs of the students.

2. It should start with the psychological preparation to open students' minds to any cultural alternative.

3. Intercultural education should be reflexive. It compares aspects or patterns of the foreign culture with the native culture, in order to foster students' self-awareness.

4. Intercultural education should proceed in a critical way: existing stereotypes, prejudices and devaluing attitudes will be detected, analysed and subverted. Students should be led towards unprejudiced, critical thinking as well as towards a positive disposition for communication and understanding.

5. Once the negative attitudes and anxiety have been overcome, the process of language socialization can be introduced by making students aware of the interdependence of language and culture.

6. The teaching of cognitive structures, ranges of values and patterns of behaviour should extend the learners' progress towards tertiary socialization: the students' readiness for contact with members of a foreign culture (speakers of the foreign language). Herein the sixth principle of the adaptation model becomes fulfilled.

7. The unity of socialization and foreign language teaching should lead towards intercultural communicative competence in our students.

8. Finally, intercultural education should be relation-oriented. The relationship our students maintain with the people of their cultural environment will serve as an impulse for the broadening of their relationship to people of other cultures. This will be the final aim of intercultural education.

Materials and activities for meaningful culture study in the foreign language classroom have been developed by Seelye (1987), Hendon (1992), Mantle-Bromley (1993), Tomalin – Stempleski (1993), among others.

5. Conclusion

Some implications of intercultural education in the foreign language classroom can be drawn from this. First, intercultural education will help to solve several of our current conflicts. According to the goals previously mentioned the characteristics of intercultural education will serve to extinguish ethnocentricity by overcoming stereotypes, prejudices and the feelings of anxiety towards cultural otherness. The core of the programme, the process of socialization will enhance cognitive flexibility. The introduction to and understanding of different behavioural patterns should increase behavioural flexibility. Cultural knowledge will be achieved through the choice of material and the content of interaction in the foreign language classroom. It will be transmitted through language socialization as well as by guiding students towards the tolerance of different ranges of values, beliefs and conventions. The paramount aim of intercultural education revealed in the eighth characteristic will promote students' interpersonal sensitivity.

As to foreign language learning, students will experience the possibility and need for communication with members of other cultures. They will feel curiosity and empathy towards the speakers of a foreign language, mainly because they will be helped to overcome their fear of losing their identity.

From a broader, political point of view, intercultural education will shape a future generation able to reject the ethnocentric, nationalistic attitudes that hinder nowadays a peaceful European consensus. Intercultural education permits the maintenance of different autonomous cultures in Europe. As anthropologists and sociologists suggest, Europe should constitute a polycentric common culture, so that:

a) each culture can develop its own structures, instead of being suppressed by a majority culture;

b) there will be more cultural variety with the different cultures enriching one another;

c) each culture has the possibility of solving its particular local problems;

d) there will be a greater permeability among and flexibility towards other cultures;

e) the unity of different cultures grants greater stability for the whole community.

At the same time, intercultural education in the foreign language classroom will enhance multilingualism by maintaining each mother tongue as well as by fostering competence in at least two other European languages. Current intercultural education, by means of already existing programmes, such as Lingua, seeks precisely to promote FLL as a vehicle for wider cultural expression and experience.

The main function of multilingualism, intercultural communication, will also avoid the danger of linguistic imperialism. The pre-dominance of languages of powerful economic political systems, such as English, will be counterbalanced by three factors; firstly, the conservation of and respect for each mother tongue; secondly, the learning of other European languages other than English, and thirdly, intercultural communication involves the use of several languages, banning the "official" exclusivity of English. Thus, learning English or any other foreign language will not necessarily entail learning subservience or alienating attitudes: the process could equally well serve to unlock the oppressive constraints of culture and awake a consciousness of self-worth.

It follows that intercultural education is our most important means of avoiding language and cultural chauvinism, the mentality of imperialism and ethnocentrism. Multilingualism requires the encounter of a variety of languages in the foreign language classroom, the equity of languages on the European range of values and the lack of language-identity. The unity of a variety of languages and cultures should be the most enriching result of intercultural education in multicultural societies, such as Europe.

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