

## **MAKING INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE LEARNING VISIBLE AND ASSESSABLE**

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While languages education (Liddicoat, 2002) is being transformed by intercultural language learning theory, there is little illustration of either how students are achieving intercultural learning or how to assess it. This article reports on a study of high school language students in Sydney, Australia. Its findings make visible student intercultural learning within language study and thus make possible new modes of assessment of this learning. Pedagogical implications arising from this study are discussed.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Scholars such as DeJaeghere and Zhang (2008) have proposed that a shift in focus to intercultural education and pedagogy brings about effective and engaged student classroom learning across the curriculum. At the core of intercultural education is both intercultural sensitivity and intercultural competence; intercultural educational programs are those that develop students' abilities to think, act, discriminate and experience cultural difference in appropriate ways (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008, p. 255).

When applied to languages education, intercultural practice in classrooms similarly asks students to think and act appropriately within a growing knowledge of the culture within language. No longer is a linguistic proficiency the sole aim of teaching and learning, rather there are "new names and targets" (Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan & Street, 2001, p. 3): a set of intercultural understandings which allows students to develop understandings of why language is as it is, and how processes of language impact on meaning. It is similar to intercultural communication, "which teaches about interaction at the cultural borderline" (Bleszynska, 2008, p. 538).

The linking of language and culture in the foreign language classroom has for more than a decade now been problematised and debated (Kramsch, 1993; Byram, 1989; Lo Bianco, 2003; Liddicoat, 2002). Lo Bianco (2003) has posited that there is a "visible/invisible" aspect to culture in language, and classroom practice needs to recognise this. Language teachers have come to perceive that it is their role to elicit language and culture learning from students in their classrooms to be able to judge that learning, and report on developments and progress made.

There are questions that remain about classroom practice and student learning however. How does a language teacher make the intercultural visible? How do we know a student has become 'intercultural'? How does a student perform and analyze their new intercultural understandings? How do we assess student achievement?

This paper presents findings that address these questions from data from a study of one high school context in Australia.

The study reported here was undertaken in a comprehensive co-educational school in inner-city Sydney, Australia, which offers preschool, primary and secondary education. Groups of high school students, aged 12-14 years, in the first and second years of high school (Years 7 and 8) were learning variously French, German, Italian, Spanish and Japanese. Moloney (2008), in research on this same student cohort two years previously, reported that many cultural backgrounds and languages were represented among their families.

The research question underpinning this study focuses on whether intercultural learning can be observed in students, and whether its visibility makes it therefore more easily assessable. Although only a short term study, the researchers used an investigative approach related to ethnography to explore learning in students, through observations and dialogues. As an outcome of this research, the researchers ask whether this methodology itself could provide an assessment model for teachers themselves to observe and examine their students' achievements and development.

## **LOCAL CURRICULUM CONTEXT**

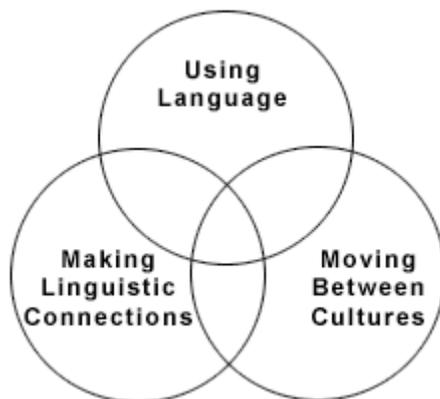
The current language syllabus, NSW Board of Studies K-10 (Board of Studies NSW, 2003), in the Australian context under examination represents a theoretical and conceptual shift in language teaching compared to its predecessors. It is aligned with theoretical sociolinguistic models of the intercultural language learning movement (Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino, & Kohler, 2003), a movement which has conceptualized new goals for language learning in school students.

In the past, guided by previous syllabus frames, teachers may have focused on just one goal for language learning: that is, language acquisition with its focus on correct form, grammars, pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition and so on. A teacher's aim was to assess students' language use, primarily reported through statements on listening, speaking, reading and writing.

However, the current syllabus from 2003 conceptualizes language development as occurring in three areas of learning outcomes: not solely the aforementioned language

use (which the new syllabus calls 'Using Language (UL).') The new syllabus (see Figure 1) also focuses on the type of learning called 'Making Linguistic Connections (MLC)', and learning called 'Moving Between Cultures (MBC).'

Figure 1. New South Wales Board of Studies languages syllabus objectives (Board of Studies NSW, 2003).



Language teachers are encouraged to design teaching programs which assess student learning and knowledge development in each of 'Using language,' 'Making linguistic connections' and 'Moving between cultures.' These objectives for language programs are to be assessed at stages between Kindergarten to Year 10.

Although the new syllabuses appeared in 2003, teachers have only gradually come to terms with what it means to be assessing MLC and MBC, considered as the two less straightforward areas of intercultural language learning. What is at the heart of a teacher's engagement with the new intercultural imperatives is teachers' examination of how to judge a learner's interculturality. Involved therefore are assessment notions: how teachers set up intercultural language learning in order to assess and evaluate such learning at a later point in time.

There has been little formal evaluation of whether and how students are achieving intercultural language learning goals. Research in other states of Australia as well as in the UK show very little progress in our understandings of judging whether and how our language learners become intercultural (Byram, 1997; Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 1999; Scarino, 2007b).

The research project reported below aims to add illustration to the emerging literature on the subject. This project, with its background of asking what it means, vis-à-vis student language production and reception, to be Using Language, Making Linguistic Connection and Moving between Cultures, looks for evidence of such learning in these areas in student demonstrations of learning. The theoretical framing of the study broadly sits therefore within two key areas in the literature. The intercultural notions sit

within the theories of language acquisition which have grown around sociocultural theory. The assessment notions are situated within theoretical understandings about the process of learning.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

It is now well established among key second language acquisition scholars that sociocultural theory has a rightful place alongside other major theories such as Universal Grammar, cognition and L2 learning, interlanguage, input, constructivism and functionalist/pragmatic approaches (Mitchell & Myles, 2004).

What is essentially an examination of the intersection of language and culture has brought about scholarly interest in what, if any, intercultural learning takes place in children engaged in second language learning. Intercultural Language Learning (ICLL) is currently promoted (Liddicoat et al., 2003) as a new pedagogy which will “make a qualitative difference to students’ engagement in learning languages” (Liddicoat et al., 2003) and bring about greater acquisition of intercultural skills through particular tasks and attitudes.

Essentially intercultural language learning is viewed by scholars in the Australian context as a ‘stance’ or ‘orientation’ (Scarino, 2007a) adopted by the teacher and learners towards the language learned, towards the language processes learned, and towards their new understandings of ‘other and self’ as a result of a deep and reflective examination of their learning. Indeed it is proposed that it is the intercultural understandings that students acquire, that may be the critical factor in their deeper learning and world view (Liddicoat et al. , 2003 p.46).

Essentially within the intercultural notions lies a belief that language itself is a cultural act (Kramersch, 1993). The literature of intercultural language learning (cited in Liddicoat et al., 2003) acknowledges its debt to the anthropologist Geertz (1973):

This paradigm for teaching culture sees culture as sets of practices, that is, as the lived experience of individuals (Geertz, 1973). Such a view of culture of necessity sees action as context-sensitive, negotiated and highly variable...cultural competence is seen as the ability to interact in the target culture in informed ways...a solid approach to culture should integrate a range of different understandings of culture as a core component of language education. (Liddicoat et al., 2003, p. 6)

Byram (1989) and Kramersch (1993) describe a process of the individual developing intercultural competence through de-centering from their own first culture. Intercultural

behaviour is seen as the individual's ability to negotiate meaning across cultural boundaries and to establish their own identity as a user of another language. Kramsch (1993) has suggested the notion of the learner developing a third space from which he/she can make reflective observations of both one's own culture and the target culture.

The *Report on Intercultural Language Learning* (Liddicoat et al, 2003) traces and synthesises developments in language, culture, intercultural learning, models of intercultural sensitivity, and how to measure it. Earlier Liddicoat (2002) had argued for a non-linear, cyclical process of intercultural competence which draws attention to the student's internal processes of 'noticing' differences, features of the language, and teacher behaviours. All of this is an important part of the production of their speaking/writing output. This process continues as the student evaluates or reflects on their output, compares current knowledge with prior knowledge, and adjusts and modifies output as a result.

The imperative to measure cross-cultural attitudes in an individual implies an individual-based learning process which can be divided into simple components. Yet Pavlenko and Lantolf's argument should be noted: that it is

...about second language learning not as the acquisition of a new set of grammatical lexical and phonological forms but as a struggle of concrete socially constituted and always situated beings to participate in the symbologically mediated lifeworld of another culture. (2000, p. 155)

In other words, the process of language learning is equally as important as the product. Moran (2001) advises that in looking at how students learn culture (within the language learning process), teachers can examine students knowing how, knowing about, knowing why and knowing themselves in the learning process.

Vygotsky (as outlined in Daniels, Wertsch & Cole, 2007) described learning as being embedded within social events and occurring as a child interacts with people, objects and events in the environment. Addressing such understandings about learning lets us see clearly that learning is "not merely information processing carried out solo by an individual" (Donato, 2000 p. 33). Intercultural language education research needs to address the perceptions of the whole child in his/her whole social and cultural setting, using a range of techniques (Moloney, 2008). The language classroom, with authentic communicative processes in operation, is a suitable context in which to investigate learning and development.

In order to examine how a language learner can be judged as achieving intercultural learning, there is a need to deconstruct the process of learning itself. Such a discussion follows in the next section.

### **Theories of the process of learning**

The dominant 20<sup>th</sup> century paradigm about the process of learning and curriculum portrayed learning as a static process (Shepard, 2000, p. 5). Today there is more agreement, according to Scarino (2007b) that

students construct knowledge and understandings within a sociocultural context, that new learning is shaped by prior knowledge and cultural perspectives, and that intelligent thought involves meta-cognition or self-monitoring of learning and thinking. (p. 4)

Shepard (2000,) outlines a reformed vision of the “principles of curriculum theories, psychological theories and assessment theory” (p. 8) of a constructivist paradigm. The process of learning, according to this reformed conceptualization, involves learners:

- actively building on their prior knowledge and cultural perspectives
- displaying higher order thinking and problem solving
- developing certain important dispositions and habits of mind
- demonstrating learning of processes in learning itself, as well as content of learning outcomes through metacognition or self monitoring of learning and thinking
- actively evaluating their own work. (Shepard, 2000, p. 8)

Scarino’s work (2007b) outlines what is necessary for assessing intercultural aspects of student language learning as it relates to Shepard’s (2000) statements. She focuses on students as ‘performers’ with the language they produce throughout all their language learning processes. Through producing the target language within the required tasks of the language classroom, students are also negotiating meaning and producing language. She also notes that students are ‘analysers’: they receive and process language and its processes through analysing the language they are learning.

Consequently when language teachers are evaluating or judging their students’ intercultural learning, it may be very suitable to frame such a judgement around the following notions:

In performing the language they learn, students demonstrate intercultural learning when they use, speak and write the target language, and respond to material in the target language they have listened to, read or viewed.

In analysing the language they learn, students demonstrate intercultural learning outcomes in the five ways that Shepherd has outlined (see above).

It will be the task of the language teacher, therefore, to elicit such demonstrations of learning, both performed understandings and analysed understandings. Through informed design of interactions and tasks, it becomes possible to assess intercultural learning using the ways suggested by Scarino and Gould-Drakeley (2009), Van Dalen (2009), Schultz (2007) and Lazar, Huber-Kriegler, Lussier, Matei and Peck (2007).

## **PREVIOUS STUDIES**

There is limited research on evaluating/assessing intercultural competence in classroom language learners. Two studies, one in the USA (Corbaz, 2001) and one in Australia (Moloney, 2008), have examined assessment of intercultural competence in language learning in young language learners. Morgan (2009), focusing on meaning-making for young learners, examines a teaching and learning orientation in which learners are encouraged to share their developing understanding with others in scaffolded social interactions. Morgan (2009) captures how young learners of 5-8 years of age are invited to share their own experiences and understanding of self and others through engaging with authentic target language texts in class discussions.

Little research has been undertaken however on the identification of intercultural skills in high school adolescent learners. Ten years ago, intercultural theorists Crozet and Liddicoat (1999) stated that teaching languages interculturally is a

shift in what constitutes cultural understanding which forces language educators to teach about communication in much more depth than they had to before when language teaching was limited to the teaching of linguistic forms or functions. (p. 119)

What is sought in this study is to contribute to progress in this area. Liddicoat (2002, p. 6) commented that the core problem is “that there is no clearly articulated link between cultural knowledge and language use, nor of the way the information taught will affect the learner as a user of the language.” Liddicoat (2004) commented on the lack of research on the nature of intercultural competence as a “problem for both assessment and for curriculum design” (p. 20). We believe limited research can be found to examine the theoretical notions, and in order to investigate a ‘new’ dimension of

language, the negotiation of second culture in learners, new methodologies must be employed appropriate to the concept under investigation.

## **METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION OF THIS STUDY**

As the language learners in our study are termed variously cultural mediators, border crossers, negotiators of meaning, and intercultural speakers (Roberts et al., 2001, p. 3) and they learn the target language through processes of deep investigation and reflection, then it may be suitable that both the language teachers and the students themselves acknowledge what might be termed ethnographic processes in the strategies they employ to engage with the new language they learn. Roberts et al. (2001) describe ethnography as:

both a method involving the detailed observation and description of particular forms of behaviour and a written ... account based on social and cultural theories... Conceptual frameworks are developed for observing and understanding ... methods of observation, analysis and writing which engage learners in a process of encountering 'otherness.' (pp. 3-4)

Language teachers can be seen to be undertaking ethnographic processes in their language teaching, underpinned by ideas that students are studying the target country group's social and cultural practices "from an insider's perspective" (Roberts et al., 2001, p. 3).

Like the ethnographers who go out 'into the field' to look very closely at the phenomenon they are examining, as the two researchers participating in this study, we too have not only adopted 'ethnographic techniques' that we describe below, but that we also maintain have allowed us to explore the students' intercultural awareness. If what we are doing in taking an intercultural 'stance' in our language teaching and learning is actually a form of investigative stance, then it is suggested that ethnography is a model for the kinds of 'practitioner research' that we might be undertaking.

Moran (2001) suggests that

learners need to recognize what they are going through and to purposefully take action. As teachers, we can help learners bring their experiences to the surface, to expression and articulation, so that they can decide how to respond to the culture. When learners do name their experiences – what they perceive, think, or feel – we need to be ready to help them situate this within a larger framework... When learners can

place their experiences against these models, they gain additional perspective and clarity. (p. 124)

The techniques that we have employed to allow us to explore intercultural notions are therefore not only part of our methodology for our research, but become, as discussed in our findings, the methods we suggest that teachers employ as being suitable to examine students' intercultural awareness development.

### **Other background to the methodology**

Baker (2006) has commented on the notions presented here about both suitable research methodology and the assessment of intercultural learning:

language tests and measurements are unlikely to fully represent an idea or theoretical concept. Complex and rich descriptions are the indispensable partner of measurement and testing. (p. 39)

The methods utilised by scholars engaging in explorations of the place of culture in language learning are based on more qualitative designs. Armour (2001) studied six adult learners of Japanese, by collecting first-person narrative life histories. Armour's work proposes that there appears to be a significant link between the Japanese language, and how a student socially constructs his or her world view including identity. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000, p.156) note that these kind of narratives have been largely ignored in social and human sciences.

Language research is thus engaged in methodological change, to the inclusion of qualitative research approaches, effective in interpretation and description of learner understanding of language and culture, and intercultural identity (Nunan, 1992). As the researchers in this project, we gathered data on students both performing their learning and analyzing what they had learned. The use of the focus group interviews resembled and extended the kind of intercultural teaching that could be heard in an intercultural language classroom with teacher interrogating the student knowing about, knowing how, knowing why and knowing themselves. It was designed 'to obtain descriptions of the lived world of the interviewees with respect to interpretations of the meaning of the described phenomena' (Kvale, 1996).

Using a mixed method data collection strategy, this project collected a variety of student data in one Australian school site, to examine evidence of whether and how Year 7 and 8 students (aged 12-13) achieve the intercultural learning outcomes in NSW Board of Studies K-10 Language Syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2003).

## **Research Design**

As discussed above, it has been suggested that intercultural development is facilitated by classroom questioning by both teachers and students (Morgan, 2007), through classroom investigation (Crichton, 2007), and in interaction (Scarino, 2007b). Reflective learning occurs in what may be described as “pausing points” which follow or are associated with such activities. The purpose in this project of the focus group interviews is to “mirror” and provide an opportunity to extend the scope of those classroom reflections.

**Researchers’ roles.** The two researchers, at the time of data collection, represented both an “inside” (practising teacher) and an “outside” (academic) viewpoint, to strengthen the analytical perspective. The “inside” researcher had not taught any of the students in the study, but was known to them as a staff member in the school at the time. For the “inside” researcher, in both the collection and analysis of data, her knowledge of the students and their context facilitated her adaptation of the semi-structured focus group interviews, and identification of both the “explicit and tacit cultural knowledge” (Neuman, 2000, p.348) of students. Both researchers were involved in the analysis of data and had the ability to “examine social meanings” and “multiple perspectives in natural social settings” (Neuman, 2000, p.349).

**Participants and site selection.** This project examined student language learning data in a case study done at a high school, in groups of students engaged in Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8) learning. In observation of five classes, total number of participants was one hundred and five (n=105) students. The total number of participants in focus group discussions was thirty (n=30). The age range of participants was 12-14 years. Data was collected from classes in four languages, German, Japanese, Italian, and Spanish (two classes). The gender balance was approximately 50% male, 50% female as this balance occurred in the selected (coeducational) classes. Focus group participants included both advanced and beginner students. All students were engaged with the study of two non-English languages.

A random sampling method was used to select and invite 6 students from each language class, to act as participants in the focus groups. This sampling was undertaken by listing all students in each language and targeting every third or fourth student, depending on the size of the class.

Students in the classroom observations are represented by number (Student 1, Student 2) in the Findings section below. Student participants in the focus groups section are represented by the initials of student names.

Table 1. Number of student participants in classroom observation and focus groups.

	Italian	Japanese	Spanish	German
Classroom observation	25	18	52	10
Focus groups	6	6	12	6

The school in which the case study was conducted was the International Grammar School, a secular, independent, K–12 coeducational school, in inner-city Sydney, founded in 1984. Both the student population and the staff are culturally diverse. The school was chosen due to its commitment to the provision of languages education, and the variety of language classes which could be examined at the same Stage. The school features a partial immersion language program in the primary school (Moloney, 2004). Language study is compulsory from Kindergarten until Year 10 (fourth year of secondary schooling).

**Data collection.** This project collected data to look for evidence of student intercultural learning, and evidence that they ‘moved between cultures’ (MBC) and ‘made linguistic connections’ (MLC) as per the specific areas conceptualised by the local syllabus outlined above. It also investigated how this was being assessed by the teachers. Methods selected to collect data were:

- Classroom observation field notes by researchers in five different lessons (included 2 Spanish classes).
- Audio recording of the same five lessons in which researchers took field notes.
- Audio recording of five focus group interviews, each of 40 minutes duration, each comprising 6 students and one researcher. These interviews involved stimulated recall about class work, and students’ responses to semi-structured questions, to give an opportunity for participants’ expression of perceptions of learning and attitudes. Students were asked about their perceptions of what and how they learned, using samples of classwork chosen by the students.
- Interview with the language teacher – a semi-structured discussion, asking the teacher to recall the Spanish lesson and provide any perceptions she had about the student learning.

Analysis of transcripts of classroom observation and focus groups, together with analysis of classroom field notes, became the principal source of observation data.

Triangulation occurred through analysis of data collected from these different sources. Approval of the data collection methods, and for all aspects of the research, was given by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee in August 2008.

**Data coding and analysis techniques.** An iterative, inductive process was used in the analysis of data.

- Classroom observation field notes were examined by researchers for evidence of students as ‘performers’ and ‘analysers’ of intercultural understandings
- A transcript of the audio-recordings of each classroom observation was made. These transcripts were examined by researchers and emerging themes identified by interpretive analysis.
- A transcript of the audio-recordings of each focus group interview was made. The transcripts were read and re-read, and were coded to observe emerging themes identified by interpretive analysis.

## FINDINGS

This section presents findings from a selection of data collected in classroom observation and focus groups. In order to focus on the most relevant data, there is an uneven representation of the four languages in the findings. This section provides illustration of students engaged in both performance and analysis of intercultural learning. These will be examined in turn.

### 1. Students’ performance of intercultural understandings, through using language.

#### Italian

We believe that students demonstrated their ability to perform their intercultural learning. A sequence of two Year 8 Italian lessons provides an example of students producing language which involved cognitive engagement and intercultural analysis, embedded in social interaction. In the first lesson in simple Italian the teacher gave an overview of the most important festivals in Italy and the value attached to them. The teacher frequently asked questions that demanded critical thought and personal opinion on the part of the students, such as:

Teacher: Secondo voi, la festa di Carnevale e` una festa religiosa, pagana o commerciale? (*in your opinion is Carnevale a commercial festival, religious festival, or a pagan festival?*)

Students offered a variety of answers to this question and a friendly argument ensued in English as to their choices.

In the second lesson the goal was to extend the students' critical opinion to comparing Italian festivals with Australian festivals. In groups student composed phrases about what both Italian and Australian teenagers like to do at festival time.

Examples included:

*Ai Giovani [sic] italiani piacciono stare insieme e scambiare i regali per natale (Young Italians like being together and exchanging presents for Christmas)(Student 1)*

*Ai giovani australiani piace fare un BBQ per la festa di Australia (Young Australians like having a BBQ on Australia Day)(Student 2)*

*Ai giovani australiani piace assistere ad una marcia il giorno di ANZAC (Young Australians like to watch the march on ANZAC day) (Student 3)*

The teacher confirmed and extended the validity of their answers by adding comments such as *ANZAC è una giornata emozionante (Anzac day is an emotional day).*

Groups of students then ranked which, in their opinion, were the most important Australian festivals, and why. The teacher scaffolded a possible answer and suggested they look for the verbs they needed in the dictionaries, giving them the opportunity to express their true opinion emerging from the group interaction. Group decisions included:

*Per noi il giorno di Australia è al primo posto perchè mangiamo dell'agnello (no. 1 is Australia Day, because we eat lamb) (Student 4)*

*Il capodanno è al primo posto per noi perchè ci sono dei fuochi d'artificio (no.1 is New Year's Eve because there are fireworks) (Student 5)*

*Il Natale perchè festiggiamo la nascita di Gesù (Christmas because we celebrate the birth of Jesus) (Student 6)*

This task is demanding that students use the target language to problem-solve and make values-based decisions. They have investigated the meaning of festival practices in Italy, identified meaning and value in their own cultural practice, debated and expressed their own values, all developed through social interaction.

## Japanese

Students also offered their responses to favourite texts and lessons in focus group interviews. The student below reported that she had enjoyed reading a text about being in an *onsen* (public bath):

*Student LY: I chose this passage on how there are different styles of accommodation in Japan. It's got an Australian person who goes to an onsen and how they feel, because they have to go nude. (Student reads question from sheet.) "The person in the manga is embarrassed to take off their clothes in the onsen. From this point of view, what is the difference between Australians and Japanese?"*

*Interviewer: How would you feel?*

*Student LY: embarrassed, well, actually, I'd get used to it.... I wouldn't be like super-embarrassed. I'd get in.*

The task is demanding that she understand the Japanese practice, and actively examine her own cultural practice, in order to describe the difference. The interviewer asked her to imagine her own engagement in this activity and probable response to it. This is an interpretation of cultural information that requires imagination and self-perception.

In sum, in the data examples chosen, students are visibly enacting their intercultural understandings in speaking and writing and responding to the target language.

## 2. Students' Analysis of intercultural understandings.

We also maintain that students have demonstrated their ability to analyse their intercultural learning. Students are actively engaged, in the following examples, in analysis of language and social practice, of linguistic difference, of themselves and their membership of two or more language communities.

## Spanish

A Year 8 Spanish lesson required students to think through processes for meeting and greeting, when visiting people for dinner, in Spain. Moving between Spanish and English, the teacher drew out cultural similarities and differences, and allowed students time to tell their own stories, and ask questions. Students arranged pictures of different stages of the Spanish dinner party in correct sequence. This activity raised many issues, and some lively hypothesising in English. Students noticed that at the end of the party no one in the dialogue says "thank you." Through discussion they came to the

conclusion that in Spain, the fact that the guests stay at the hosts' home very late, and also that they reciprocate the invitation, indicate appreciation.

In the focus group following this lesson, students added their further analysis of the meaning of the different usage of the term "thank you":

Student CG: ... *you don't really need to say please and thank you as much in Spain. Like we say it almost unnecessarily.*

Student SW: *Yeah, it was strange because we say it so much, so it seemed kind of odd.*

Student CG: *It was just kind of a habit for us to say it, but for them they only say it when it's absolutely necessary, which is probably because then it's more meaningful. The less you say it, the more significant it is.*

Through social interaction the students work out how both the Australian and the Spanish indicate their appreciation. The students are remarkably able to de-center from their own practice of expressing gratitude by saying thank you, and can perceive the meaning and value in the Spanish practice. In fact, they go beyond this, as they critique the possible insincerity of their own practice and suggest that the Spanish practice may be more meaningful than their own. They manipulate this cultural information and come up with a transformation of their perception:

*"The less you say, the more significant it is"* represents that student's interpretation, where cultural information has been manipulated to transform its meaning for the student. One student described her perception of this process as:

*when you learn other languages, you learn so much about your own, you begin to understand both. (Student JO)*

### Japanese

A student analysed her pleasure in her discovery and mastery of special words unique to Japanese, to describe traditional artifacts and activities:

*Student SL: I like doing Western style and Japanese style stuff, like washoku (Japanese food) and yushoku (western style food). Instead of saying "nihon no uchi" (literally Japanese house) they say "wafu" (a special term for Japanese style) like one concept... I used to have to translate literally using "nihon no uchi" but now I can say just "wafu"*

Interviewer: *it's a convenient shortcut?*

Student SL: *yes and its special.*

Student SL's use of the word "special" indicates an intercultural analysis she has engaged in to appreciate this Japanese term which enhances her own Japanese, eliminating her typically non-native practice of translating the idea literally from English. We also note her ownership shift from "they" to "I," denoting her perception of her linguistic membership of this group as a non-native speaker, particularly in light of this new "inside" knowledge.

Italian

Italian students analyse *how* the teacher speaks Italian as well as *what* she says. They interpret that the Italian teacher's energetic performance of Italian has cultural meaning, which they describe as "social", and that they, as members of this language community are also expected to perform the language with "more energy."

*Student JC: Like all the teachers here are social, like when she comes into the room she's like (student shouts) "Buon giorno"!*

*Student PG: Most teachers would just be like (student speaks quietly) "good morning"*

*Student JC: Yeah like if we don't know, every time she says like a word she does like an action so we all know what it would be. And if we go (student speaks quietly) "buon giorno", she would be like, (shouts) "more energy!!"*

Another Italian student identifies there are ways of performing as "a proper Italian," in his analysis of the continuity of language and culture, and his perception of how language has shaped national behaviour and identity:

*Student WM: I think the main point of the lesson is trying to help us understand Italy and the language we're learning because the language lesson is teaching us about the culture and teaching us about the way Italians have sort of become proper Italians.*

In sum, students were seen to be both performers and analysers of their intercultural learning: they are actively building on their prior knowledge and cultural perspectives, displaying higher order thinking and problem solving skills, and demonstrating metacognitive development, self monitoring of their learning and thinking. Examples from the data demonstrate that students analyse how their learning engages their prior knowledge and shifts their cultural perspective.

## FINDINGS

### Teacher Perceptions of Assessability of Student Intercultural Learning

Though the focus of the data collection was the students and their learning, the classroom context and teacher approach to assessment were also observed and investigated. The assessment beliefs and practices of the Spanish teacher, Irina Braun, provide useful further perspective. The teacher includes different aspects of intercultural learning in both formative and summative assessment. This includes assessment of performance in roleplays and writing tasks, such as might follow on from the Spanish dinner party lesson. One of the marking criteria used is that the student language displays “knowledge of appropriate language and manners.” The teacher reports on her practice:

I measure intercultural learning, not so much by what language they are **using**, but by the language they are **not using**. For instance, **not** including “thank you”, not translating an idea from English direct into Spanish. I am listening (or reading) for the use of idiom and “real” sounding Spanish, or, for example, for attempting to include little typical scenarios like when you are being offered more food, the ritual of refusing, offering again, and accepting. Or when the guest is trying to depart, they are persuaded to stay longer. These little details represent a lot of knowledge, they make a big difference.... I like to call it being a connoisseur of language...the students call it knowing how to be a “proper” Spanish person...they understand that these little “secrets” open the door to the real Spain. It also makes them realise there are little “secrets” that operate in Australian life too. (I. Braun, personal communication, 2009)

While outside the scope of the lessons observed in this study, the teacher reports that she has used some of the task and assessment suggestions from both the European context offered by Lazar, Huber-Kriegler, Lussier, Matei, & Peck (2007), and from the American context suggested by Schultz (2007). She will also move to the introduction of a progressive student learning log. In a reflective learning log, over an extended period, students respond to a series of questions and language tasks which investigate their own attitudes and beliefs about culture and language. Scarino and Gould-Drakely (2009) have detailed the outstanding learning outcomes of this activity, related to autoethnography, and have developed effective assessment criteria which recognize student development and achievement.

Scarino and Gould-Drakeley (2009) and Van Dalen (2009) have underlined the importance of the visibility and assessability issue in the development of intercultural language learning. The belief that a new form of learning is assessable is crucial for teachers' acceptance and implementation of new practice. Assessment practice highlights pedagogical values and it lies at the heart of discovering and highlighting the nature of intercultural skills, and to what extent students are successfully acquiring these skills. Teachers are engaged in developing innovative assessment practices which capture and recognize new student learning and which will both shape and support the future development of intercultural language learning.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper set out to investigate whether intercultural learning in language students is visible (Lo Bianco, 2003) and assessable. The analysis of the data above successfully shows students in the process of 'becoming intercultural,' making visible a new kind of student learning taking place within language learning.

The data collection methodology of this study made it possible to demonstrate that achieving intercultural learning involves:

- students using/performing (Scarino, 2007b) target language and English in social interaction to express opinions, problem-solve, use high-order thinking.
- students actively testing and engaging their prior knowledge, that is, their existing cultural expectations
- student discovering and analysing cultural and linguistic differences (Scarino, 2007b; Shepard, 2000)
- students delineating their own intercultural identity as adolescent Australians
- students participating in mediating the life of another culture

This learning must be valued and acknowledged in informed assessment practices (Lazar et al., 2007; Van Dalen, 2009; Schultz, 2007). One teacher from the case study has detailed assessment practices she uses to identify successful learning. The pedagogic implications are briefly discussed below.

## **Implications**

A number of pedagogic implications arise from this study.

1. The study confirms that there is educational value in teachers encouraging and allowing time for L1 or target language reflective questions and answers, which actively connect language study with the students' own experience.
2. Examples from the data show that intercultural learning is achievable in the target language, through task design which empowers learners to collaboratively problem-solve and express opinions in the target language.
3. This study shows that intercultural competence as part of language competence can be recognized and accorded value in informed assessment practices, if students are given the chance to demonstrate it. In tasks such as in the Italian lesson above, it is possible (using the Australian terms) to recognize students' development in both UL (constructing the sentence re their opinion) and MBC (ability to analyze cultural practices between cultures).
4. If teachers understand what MBC represents, i.e. "know what to look for," informed assessment strategies will recognize the ability to both produce and understand texts with intercultural learning. Through task design and assessment strategies teachers can create opportunities for students to demonstrate their intercultural learning, as part of their language development. Lazar et al. (2007) suggest assessment of this kind should be more formative than summative, continuous rather than at fixed points, and holistic.

Further research and teacher education are needed into providing teachers with deeper understanding of student intercultural language learning, and into new assessment procedures with which teachers can capture and report on the depth of that learning.

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