



From Fact to Function: HOW INTERCULTURALITY IS CHANGING OUR VIEW OF CULTURE

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The addition of the term *interculturality* into the lexicon of world language learning has profoundly challenged our way of thinking about culture and its relationship to language proficiency. By looking at the impact of globalization on education, jobs, and government, we have come to a greater understanding about the interrelationship between language and culture and the skills and competencies needed to fully function in today's diverse and interconnected world.

Responding to Demands for World Readiness

Major federal and state education initiatives, such as the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top, and the adoption of more rigorous standards like the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics, are targeting the improvement of student performance on a global level. To compete academically at an international level, students not only need to excel at the common core subjects, they also need a common vehicle for communication, which translates into intercultural competencies.

Both business and government urge the addition of linguistic and cultural competence to the core knowledge and skill set of a world-ready graduate. Since its 2006 report *Education for Global Leadership* (www.ced.org/reports/single/education-for-global-leadership) was published, the U.S. Committee for Economic Development has been calling attention to the importance of language and cultural skills for U.S. economic security. They warn that America's continued global leadership is at risk and will depend on learners' abilities to interact with the world community at home and abroad.

In the Department of Defense's 2011 white paper entitled *Language and Culture: Changing Perspective* (tinyurl.com/dod-white-paper), the Department emphasized its Strategic Plan for Language Skills, Regional Expertise and Cultural Capabilities, stating: "To maintain a position of global leadership, the United States must broaden and deepen its language, regional, and cultural capabilities."

The calls to improve academic and economic competitiveness, and strengthen national defense strategies require educators to think differently about how to help learners develop the language and cultural competences, or interculturality, they need to build relationships—the keystone for success in global business and diverse social environments. In a 21st century global marketplace, serious competitors must have language and cultural skills to work collaboratively with people from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds at home and around the world. In other words, they must have a high degree of interculturality, the ability to actively participate in communication guided by an awareness and understanding of cultures.

How Is the Cultures Goal Changing?

Culture has always been an integral part of language learning, but the way we view culture is changing, as seen in the national language standards. The 2006 *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* highlighted the need for learners to understand the relationship between a culture's perspectives and its products and practices. The 2013 World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages revise the "Cultures" goal to "Interact with cultural competence and understanding." This refreshed, integrated approach to culture intentionally highlights the interplay between language and culture in order to develop intercultural communicative competence.

Demonstrating interculturality requires both the ability to use the language and to interact appropriately in cultural contexts. The two supporting Cultures standards still address the importance of cultural practices and products as they relate to cultural perspectives (the 3 Ps), but they now emphasize the need for learners to use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on these relationships. By having ample opportunities for authentic interaction, not only will learners progress through the levels of the language proficiency scale and increase their knowledge of culture, but they will also develop commensurate levels of interculturality.

Linguafolio®

One way for learners to reflect on their interculturality is by using the free tool LinguaFolio®. LinguaFolio, which can be downloaded from the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL) at www.ncssfl.org, has three parts:

- the **Passport**, a summary snapshot of competencies, experiences, and certificates;
- the **Dossier**, a storehouse for evidence of what learners can do with language; and
- the **Language Biography**, a repository for keeping information about learners' language background, individual learning styles, self-assessments on the Can-Do Statements, and reflections on intercultural encounters.

LinguaFolio was strongly influenced by the Common European Framework of Reference and the European Language Portfolio, which incorporated Michael Byram's theories of interculturality. In his 1997 book, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, Byram, described intercultural competence to be comprised of five *savoirs*, or types of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Finding these *savoirs* complementary to learners' communicative competence, he refers to this model as Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).

When the Language Biography section of LinguaFolio Online (LFO) was designed, the process for examining the *saviors* was simplified. Beginning in middle school, learners are asked to reflect over time on their knowledge, feelings, and actions after experiencing intercultural encounters. Encounters are defined as interactions with the target culture (e.g., people, media, literature), which cause emotional reactions (e.g., frustration, wonder, confusion). Learners could engage in this reflective process in or out of class, in paired discussion, in a journal, or in the online LinguaFolio. Opportunities for encounters for example, might occur during a virtual exchange, with an invited speaker, while interacting with an exchange student or host family, in correspondence, or when working on a collaborative project with a sister school.

First, learners summarize the encounter: what happened, who was involved, and where and when the experience took place. Then, they describe how the experience made them feel: Were they surprised,

frustrated, comfortable, angry, confused, etc.? Next, they examine what they know and don't know about their own and the target culture as it relates to the encounter. Finally, they consider what actions they might take to improve their intercultural competencies, such as anticipating differences/similarities; preparing for specific situations with research; and thinking ahead about vocabulary/language needs. For example, in preparing to send a message to a partner class, learners might want to be prepared for some common language shortcuts used by those native speakers. Or they might research what gifts/flowers are appropriate to offer for certain occasions/situations in advance.

Reflective Process Versus a Scale

A reflective process is one way of assessing interculturality. Another way is on a proficiency scale. Recognizing the importance of cultural competence in government and military settings, the Foreign Service Institute and Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) began to use

Retooling a Lesson A sample French class scenario from the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (2006, p. 84) provides a source for applying the above considerations to determine to what extent a lesson which incorporates culture can actually lead to interculturality.

Sample Learning Scenario

Targeted Standards

Interpersonal Communication
School and Global Communities
Lifelong Learning

Students in Long Island, NY, learn about hockey firsthand from players for the New York Islanders who were born in Canada and raised speaking French. Teacher David Graham, from Plainview Kennedy High School, wants to give his students a French lesson in hockey so he arranges for two players from the Islanders team to address his French students.

The students spend several hours asking questions in French about professional hockey and the players' personal lives. Afterwards, the students attend a specially priced hockey game with their parents as the Islanders play opposite the Montreal Canadiens.

Reflection

School and Global Communities: Students participate in a community activity.

Lifelong Learning: Students show evidence of enjoyment of the language.

To retool this learning activity, or others, to meet intercultural competencies, teachers may consider the following:

Does the activity target a specific range of language proficiency? It is impossible to know, as is, but language can-do statements could be used to identify a proficiency range focus. For example:

- Novice—familiar facts, memorized questions: *I can ask about the players' names, backgrounds, positions.*
- Intermediate—short descriptions of a familiar activity, comparisons: *I can ask about the players' routines, a typical road trip, how pro hockey differs from school team hockey.*
- Advanced—a complication, narration, abstract concept: *I can ask about their first game in pro hockey, how they adjust to playing with different players, a time when they experienced disappointment or joy in a game.*

Does the activity provide background cultural knowledge and context? Not much is provided, but there are implications for exploring geography, national activities, team names/logos/venues, etc. Learners could investigate the differences in national pride in hockey versus baseball in the United States, what the colors of the Canadiens' uniform represent, what other Canadian teams exist, what foods are sold at the stadium, if school children play on hockey teams, etc.

Does the activity provide an opportunity for learners to use culturally authentic materials/resources and communicate with speakers of the language? Learners could access information from the Canadiens' website or online newspapers, participate in a classroom fantasy hockey league, read the short story or watch the film of Roch Carrier's *Le Chandail*, listen to a portion of a hockey game broadcast from Montreal, go to a Montreal school website to learn about school hockey teams, etc. Learners are asked to pose question to the players.

How is the blending of language performance and cultural knowledge (interculturality) assessed? This depends on what interculturality can-do statements were used as learning goals. For example, an interpersonal assessment activity might be the recorded interview between learners and the players. The task would include a rubric that includes both linguistic and cultural knowledge and the degree to which learners are successful in their communication.

Are learners given time and guidance to self-assess and reflect on their interculturality? Time and opportunity should be provided for learners to reflect on their experiences and self-assess on learning targets they set for themselves and their teacher set for learning outcomes.

performance-based descriptors as early as 1955 to evaluate the ability to function successfully in other cultures. The descriptors characterize competence in intercultural areas of: range of context, awareness of cultural differences, tasks and functions, culturally appropriate behavior, dealing with taboos, and literacy.

State Initiatives

The states have been a catalyst for moving the agenda of assessing interculturality forward. In 2009, New Jersey published its Core Curriculum Content Standards for World Languages (www.state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs/wl/), in which the communication and culture standards were combined into one standard that includes both linguistic and cultural content statements.

Shortly thereafter the Kentucky Department of Education built upon New Jersey's single standard and took the bold step of using the can-do statements from LinguaFolio as its state's language competencies' benchmarks and indicators. They addressed intercultural competencies by using LFO's version of Byram's reflective process.

In 2011 South Carolina partnered with Kentucky to revise each state's respective standard document. At the same time NCSSFL and ACTFL began their collaboration to align the LinguaFolio language can-do statements with the 2012 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.

Kentucky and South Carolina both adopted the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for their state documents and, together, developed a set of proficiency-based can-do statements for interculturality. Other states involved in a standards revision process are considering doing the same.

In the same way that the three modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational) establish the foundation for the states' linguistic competencies, three intercultural competencies lay the foundation for intercultural can-do benchmarks, indicators, and learning targets. They are:

- **Investigation of Cultural Products & Practices (CPP)**
I can use my language skills to investigate the world beyond my immediate environment.
- **Understanding of Cultural Perspectives (CP)**
I can use my language skills to recognize and understand others' ways of thinking as well as my own.
- **Participation in Cultural Interaction (CIA)**
I can use my language skills and cultural understanding to interact in a cultural context other than my own.

Scaled to the ACTFL proficiency levels, the benchmarks, such as: *I can function at a survival level in some cultural contexts* describe what learners can do in a broad sense in the language and with their knowledge of culture in various proficiency ranges (e.g., Novice, Intermediate, Advanced). Indicators, such as: *I can imitate some simple patterns of behavior and language in familiar situations across cultures* are more specific and can serve as unit goals. Sample learning targets are more precise: *I can sometimes identify what is culturally appropriate to say and do in gift-giving situations, such as a birthday party, New Year's Day, a wedding, etc., or I can recognize and imitate culturally appropriate behavior in a restaurant or other public place.*

Classroom-Level Application

How do teachers address interculturality in the classroom? States with standards that include benchmarks, indicators, and learning targets for interculturality provide teachers and learners can-do competency statements for organizing goal-oriented course curricula, thematic units, and daily lessons. At the end of each list of statements, there is an ellipsis mark as a reminder for teachers to customize statements for their particular purpose and for learners to set their own goals. A checklist of six steps serves as a guide for planning with interculturality in mind through a backward design process.

1. Intentionally set learning targets for language proficiency and intercultural competence.
2. Share learning targets with learners and encourage them to set their own goals.
3. Design performance assessments that integrate language and culture and assess interculturality.
4. Determine appropriate authentic resources (e.g., speakers, media, videos, audio)
5. Provide ample opportunities for learners to interact with native speakers and authentic resources.
6. Create ways for learners to reflect on and self-assess their own progress.

To retool a learning activity to meet intercultural competency standards, teachers may consider the following questions:

Does the activity target a specific range of language proficiency?

Because of a desire to share our knowledge about and experiences in a culture, teachers may be tempted to present too much cultural information for learners' language proficiency level to handle. When this happens, target language use is often abandoned and teachers slip into English. Expectations for a demonstration of cultural competencies should align with learners' language proficiency level.

Does the activity provide background cultural knowledge and context? In order to act and communicate with intercultural competence, learners must first know something about the products and practices of a culture, which often includes facts and concrete information. This knowledge alone does not demonstrate intercultural competence, but it provides a background from which to draw in making decisions about how to act or communicate appropriately. Use of the cultural knowledge can only be applied appropriately if learners are shown models of its use in authentic cultural contexts.

Does the activity provide an opportunity for learners to use culturally authentic materials/resources and communicate with speakers of the language? Beyond viewing models of how cultural knowledge can be applied, learners need a variety of opportunities to experience and practice its use in authentic ways. Some examples might be to use culturally authentic games, songs, film clips, websites, etc., rather than those that are translated from English to the target language. Schedule routine Skyped conversations with native speakers. Have students participate in a closed chat with students in a partner school in the target culture. Set up project based-learning

NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

Progress Indicators for Language Learners



The National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL) and ACTFL collaborated to create a document to help language learners know “how” and “how well” they should be able to use language in an instructional setting (classroom, online, or independent learning) at each level (Novice through Distinguished). For language educators, the document provides a clear guide for designing curriculum and units of instruction, for creating classroom assessments of performance, and for focusing instructional strategies. For both, the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements are a roadmap supporting the language learning journey.

The new document builds on NCSSFL’s *LinguaFolio*[®], which pioneered the use of statements starting with “I can . . .” to describe how learners demonstrate use of language as they move along the continuum to higher levels of proficiency. The collaboration clearly and definitively described the performance shown at each proficiency sublevel from Novice Low through Distinguished, in each mode: Interpersonal Communication, Presentational (both writing and speaking), and Interpretive (both reading and listening). The linking of *LinguaFolio* with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines aligns language learning with national and international standards for language competence, emphasizing that language learning needs to focus on communication and functional language in a cultural context.

The document includes:

- NCSSFL-ACTFL Global Can-Do Benchmarks (holistic summaries of performance, capturing how well language learners use language in each mode at each of 11 sublevels, from Novice Low through Distinguished)
- NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements (with 2–7 statements for each sublevel, capturing the general categories of types of performance for each mode, each general statement illustrated with several specific examples)

scenarios with partner schools, such as testing water pollution in local rivers; gathering data on each other’s school meals and fitness activities; establishing a shared theme-oriented blog between students from partner schools. Interview the schools’ English language learning students who speak the target language.

How is the blending of language performance and cultural knowledge (interculturality) assessed? Performance tasks in an authentic context are the only way to evaluate these integrated competencies. Assuring the authenticity of such tasks can be challenging, so more thought should be given to utilizing formative activities (e.g., interactions with guest speakers, international exchange students, international partner schools, community members in service learning projects) for assessment and self-assessment purposes. Rubrics for such tasks and experiences are designed based on intercultural indicators and learning targets.

Are learners given time and guidance to self-assess and reflect on their interculturality? From the beginning, learners should use intercultural competency descriptors to self-regulate their performance on assigned tasks. This can be as easy as showing a thumbs up/down or as challenging as selecting evidence to demonstrate meeting a particular goal. Learners should also be guided to think in retrospect about their personal intercultural encounters to examine what role language versus cultural knowledge played in their successes or missteps and to prepare for future encounters. Sometimes—particularly when language proficiency is an issue—reflection on interculturality can occur

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in a learner’s native language, but this should be thoughtfully scheduled so as not to interfere with the target language. Code switching by teachers is often seen as cognitively disruptive to the learner.

The treatment of culture in language learning has undergone a significant transformation. From “Culture Fridays”—often presented in English—to a seemingly arbitrary study of products, practices, and perspectives, and finally we have evolved to a systematic approach that links the 3 Ps not only to the proficiency levels, but also to their critical inclusion in successful cultural interactions.

As language educators plan experiences for their learners, they will need to connect learners to speakers of the target language either face-to-face or virtually. Whether they use the intercultural can-do statements written by states or write their own, the targeted intercultural competencies should be closely linked to the proficiency level of the learners with an eye on preparation for world readiness.

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