TOWARDS INTERCULTURALITY THROUGH LANGUAGE TEACHING: ARGUMENTATIVE DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

The current paper intends to reconsider the definition of culture as a first step to define interculturality. Both these definitions will be based on cognitive and communication studies, particularly on the Theory of Relevance by Sperber and Wilson. From that point, argumentation and argumentative discourse will be discussed as mediators to work on the intercultural competence. Three complementary elements will be introduced to support the use of argumentation and argumentative discourse: cooperative learning, "generative topics" and critical thinking. These three concepts together with the argumentative textual model may help develop the intercultural competence in language learning.

KEY WORDS

Culture, interculturality, argumentation, argumentative discourse, cooperative learning, generative topics, critical thinking

RESUMEN

El presente artículo intenta reconsiderar la definición de cultura como un primer paso para definir la interculturalidad. Ambas definiciones se basan en estudios cognitivos y de la comunicación, fundamentalmente la Teoría de la Relevancia de Sperber y Wilson. A partir de ahí, se presentarán la argumentación y el discurso argumentativo como mediadores para trabajar la competencia intercultural. Se discutirán tres elementos complementarios que apoyan el uso de la argumentación y el discurso argumentativo: el aprendizaje cooperativo, los temas generadores y el

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pensamiento crítico. Estos tres elementos junto con el modelo textual argumentativo pueden ayudar al desarrollo de la competencia intercultural en el aprendizaje de la lengua.

PALABRAS CLAVES

Cultura, interculturalidad, argumentación, discurso argumentativo, aprendizaje cooperativo, temas generadores, pensamiento crítico.

RESUME

Cet article vise d'abord la reconsidération de la définition de culture pour après arriver à la définition de l'interculturel. Les deux définitions ont pour base les études cognitives et celles de la communication, notamment la théorie de la pertinence de Sperber et Wilson. A partir de ce point, l'argumentation et le discours argumentatif seront présentés comme des intermédiaires pour travailler la compétence de l'interculturel. L'apprentissage coopératif, les sujets générateurs et la pensée critique seront débattus comme des éléments supplémentaires qui soutiennent l'argumentation et le discours argumentatif. Ces trois éléments unis au modèle textuel argumentatif peuvent favoriser le développement de la compétence interculturelle dans l'apprentissage de la langue.

MOTS CLES

Culture, l'interculturel, argumentation, discours argumentatif, apprentissage coopératif, sujets générateurs, pensée critique.

INTRODUCTION

Interculturality is one of the key concepts in contemporary educational arena. This statement can be proved not only by its actual presence in schools, but in those forums where relevant educational topics are defined and discussed, namely specialised publications and scientific meetings. Thus, for instance, in Spain just from March to June 2002 an important number of events concerning interculturality will be held in different cities : a conference in Aguadulce, Almería (26-28 April), two conferences in Ceuta (7-10 May and 17-22 June), and seminars in Melilla (11-14 March), Huelva (19-21 March), Salamanca (18-20 April) and Madrid (7 March).

The relevance of this concept is due to a number of reasons. Although this list is by no means exhaustive, we could mention that, first, its relevance is due to the presence in the classroom of children who stimulate a reconsideration of the cultural variable (García Castaño, Pulido Moyano y Montes del Castillo, 1999: 47). Second, as a consequence of that, interculturality is one of the forms of "attention to diversity", one of the fundamental concepts in Spanish educational law (Diaz Rosas, 2001: 95-98). Third, interculturality is part of a wider debate around globalization, its impact on society and on interpersonal relations in a world of increasing mobility.

Being, then, so "in fashion", the bibliography on the topic is simply immense. The concept of "interculturality" has been considered from two perspectives in Education. From a theoretical point of view several definitions have been provided at the same time that its philosophical, anthropological and ethical foundations have been studied, taking as a reference, for example, the Declaration of Human Rights (Aranguren Gonzalo y Sáez Ortega, 1998:56-67; AA.VV, 1999). From the practical point of view a number of strategies, resources and activities have been designed to incorporate interculturality to classroom practice (for example, in relation to modern language teaching, see Cerezal, 1999: 11-24).

Language Teaching, then, has also been affected by interculturality. It has come to cover the space which culture has always had in the language curriculum and it is considered another competence to aim at in the learning process (Trujillo, 2002a). Furthermore, the presence of interculturality in the language curriculum coincides with a general shift from linguistic to educational objectives as it is recognised that "through the process of learning a new foreign language at school (...) students are also encouraged to get involved in the construction of the world around them." (Vez, 2001: 17).

However, being interculturality still quite a novelty in the field of foreign language teaching, it is easy to understand that so far there are more theoretical discussions than practical suggestions (although, given the actual rate of production, the gap will be filled quite soon). In that sense, the objective of this article is two-fold. On the one hand it is our intention to provide an anthropologically-sound definition of interculturality for language teaching; on the other hand, taking this definition as our theoretical framework, a teaching strategy will be introduced to work on interculturality through argumentative discourse. This is, then, our contribution to fill that gap between intercultural theory and practice.

DEFINITIONS OF CULTURE AND INTERCULTURALITY FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING

Culture is a difficult term to define, which is quite logical given the array of different elements included under this term. Martín Morillas (2001: 297) has already advised that

the major stumbling block not only for success in culture teaching theory and practice, but in progress in this area of applied linguistics, has been the very notion of culture. In a way, culture is everything (...) But this pervasive presence is precisely what makes the concept of culture nearly unmanageable.

In that sense, it is frequent to mention the work by Kroeber y Kluckhohn (1952) as an example of a compilation of more than one hundred definitions of culture. However, although it may be difficult, it is important to make explicit and clear what is meant by culture before interculturality can be defined and included in the curriculum.

The most frequent definition of culture in language teaching is related to two expressions, culture with capital "C", or formal culture, and culture with small "c", or deep culture. The first includes "the geography, history, literate and great achievements of a country and its people" whereas the latter concerns "facts having to do with custom, manners, way of life or life-style." (Bueno, 1996: 362). These two ideas of culture are normally related to language proficiency, particularly as facilitators or hindrances of (reading) comprehension (Hanauer, 2001; Kuperman, 2001).

However, this sort of definitions are not anthropologically supported. This taxonomical approach to culture can only reflect the surface of such a complex construct. The elements included under formal and deep culture, those great achievements and life-styles, are material realizations of an even deeper level of culture, which is the one we aim at in our search for a definition of culture and interculturality.

Our definition of culture, then, is based on two pillars, cognitive and communication studies. Culture may be defined, according to Geertz's classical definition (1973), as a system of meanings and symbols which is historically transmitted. This definition is also related to D'Andrade's cognitive definition (1990: 65):

Learned and shared systems of meaning and understanding, communicated primarily by means of natural language. These meanings and understandings are not just representations about what is in the world; they are also directive, evocative and reality constructing in character.

These systems of meaning are based on mental models which, through communication, become widely known. Sperber (1996:31) describes socio-cultural phenomena as "ecological patterns of psychological phenomena" and, then, (ibid., 33) "cultural representations [as] a fuzzy subset of the set of mental and public representations inhabiting a given social group."

That is, precisely, the link between culture and communication, a feedback relationship in which culture is, at the same time, the source and the product, whereas communication is the medium. Or, as Martín Morillas states (2001: 295),

Humans communicate linguistically in a cultural environment that constrains the form and nature of communication. Culture constrains both what is acquired and how it is acquired. In turn, communicative processes shape the culture that is transmitted from generation to generation.

That makes culture a dynamic entity in a continuous process of transmission-modification.

Communication, according to the Theory of Relevance (Sperber y Wilson, 1995; Escandel Vidal, 1996: 109-133; Trujillo Sáez, 2001), is a process through which an addresser intends to modify the cognitive environment[1] of an addressee. To achieve this, "the communicator produces a stimulus which makes it mutually manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions I" (Sperber and Wilson, ibid.: 63). It is then from that stimulus, and having the principle of relevance[2] as a guide for interpretation, that the addressee can infer the addresser's intention and the meaning of its communicative act. Communication, then, is not a mere coding-decoding process but, above all, an inferential process, that is, an (imperfect) re-construction of

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[1] "A fact is manifest to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true. A cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him." (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 39).
[2] The First or Cognitive Principle of relevance says that "human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance", whereas the Second or Communicative Principle of Relevance says that "every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance". (Sperber and Wilson, ibid.: 260)

the addresser's message, which gives as a result wider coincidence of both cognitive environments.

In the communicative process, culture plays three roles. First, it is from and through the communicators' cultural schemata that the communicative situation is perceived and understood and the communicative act created; second, it is also from and through the communicators' cultural schemata that the meaning of the addresser's communicative act may be inferred; third, the result of the communicative act is a modification of the communicators' cognitive schemata (Vega, 1995: 402-409 and 416-420). Thus, culture and communication are deeply and necessarily connected.

It is from the perspective of this relationship that interculturality must be defined. Interculturality is defined as critical participation in communication, being aware that the assumption of culture as a watertight compartment related to nation-states or certain social groups is a fallacy whereas diversity is the feature which characterises reality. Therefore, intercultural competence represents the development of our cognitive environment motivated by the appreciation of diversity and the recognition of critical awareness and analysis as means of knowledge and communication in a complex society.

This definition intends to solve the problems of other definitions used in language teaching. Oliveras (2000: 35-36) summarises these definitions under two terms: intercultural competence as "appropriate behaviour" and as "appropriate attitude". The first definition implies two risks. First, the idea of "appropriate behaviour" and the image of the native speaker suggest that there exists a homogeneous native community, ruled by a set of norms and conventions shared by all the members of the community. Second, on trying to define "appropriate behaviour", it takes the native speaker as the norm of behaviour, precisely when the image of the native speaker is under attack by movements such as the English-as-a-lingua-franca or the English-as-an-international-language approaches. The "homogeneous community", as well as the native speaker, are simplifying generalizations of society, which is principally marked by diversity as its main feature.

The second definition of interculturality is based on attitudes and it intends to reduce ethnocentrism, to develop a general comprehension of cultures and to modify (or strengthen) the learners' attitude towards more positive stances. In this way, language teaching recovers the discourse of humanistic values. However, even if this definition seems more interesting than the previous one, we must be aware about how culture is

defined in the expression "attitude towards cultures". This expression is based on the metaphor of culture as an object, with clear limits and comparable features, so as to develop attitudes towards it as a whole (Díaz de Rada y Velasco Maíllo, 1996: 7). However, under that definition of culture we often find generalizations and, quite frequently, prejudices, whereas the dialogic, dynamic character of culture as a process is not present in either definition.

Furthermore, considering the international context, the scenario described by these two definitions is, for instance, that of a meeting between a Japanese and an American man or woman (a "cross-cultural" encounter quite frequent in intercultural literature, motivated by the importance of trade between Japan and the United States). Intercultural behaviour, as understood in that definition, is based on the recognition of each other's nationality and the attempt to behave assuming those national cultures as referents. Intecultural attitude, also defined above, normally means an attitude of respect to those national cultures. In this sense, this scenario is intercultural because it is inter-national.

However, the scenario we want to describe is that when two people meet and both of them use a lingua franca, as English may be. Say, for example, a Danish painter and an Italian schoolteacher. Gender, age, social class or educational background, among many other cognitive and affective features of both interlocutors, are, doubtless, as important as their respective nationalities. For us, being intercultural in this situation means participating in communication actively, that is, accepting diversity and using cognitive and affective skills to learn from the interlocutor as much as possible.

It is, then, important for language teaching to consider the limits and extension of culture. The history of foreign language teaching is marked by the national character of the languages under study: Latin from Rome, French from France, English from Britain or the United States. However, nor languages are constrained within national boundaries nor culture is restricted (or exclusively applicable) to nation-states. Intra-national cultural diversity may be as important as inter-national diversity, a fact not frequently admitted in foreign language, but radically important for the definition of interculturality.

To sum up, culture and communication are two intimately related elements of the process of meaning construction. Interculturality, then, is the educational objective related to culture and communication and it is defined as the active participation in communication helped by critical awareness and analysis and motivated by the

appreciation of diversity as the foundation of society. Our intention now is to find a mechanism to put into practise this theoretical definition of interculturality but without losing sight of the language teaching curriculum. Argumentation and argumentative discourse will be that mechanism.

ARGUMENTATION: DISCOURSE AND COGNITION

First of all, it is necessary to define argumentation, which is not an easy task either considering the history of the term from Ancient Greece philosophers until today. Given the limited length of this article it is not possible to go through all these contributions to the study of the term and only a sound option will be considered, the work of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1989), *Traité de l'argumentation*. This well-known book intends to study the discourse techniques which help provoke or enhance the adherence to a thesis uttered for assent (ibid., 34). In that sense, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca define argumentation from the perspective of its function, an effective argumentation being that which raises the intensity of assent of the thesis so as to provoke the foreseen action or, at least, to create an appropriate predisposition to the thesis.

Joaquim Dolz (1993) writes about the "argumentative situation", when a controversy appears on which the interlocutors must take a position to try to convince (intellectually) or persuade (affectively) each other, to a large extent anticipating and counterclaiming each other's position in advance; this "argumentative situation" may have diverse verbal realizations, not necessarily in the form of an argumentative text (a narrative text can convince or persuade as powerfully as an argumentative text, as commercials with narrative structures prove everyday).

For that reason, Dolz defines argumentative discourse as something different from argumentative situation. Argumentation is defined as a sort of dialogue with the interlocutor's thoughts to transform his or her opinions. Argumentative discourse refers both to the argumentative situation and to the properties of the argumentative text, including arguments and counter-arguments (Dolz, ibid.: 68). In that sense, argumentative discourse has been analysed, following the theory of text typology, in a number of different ways, as Bassols and Torrent (1997: 29-68) summarise.

On some previous occasions (Trujillo, 2000, 2001b) we have also proposed an analysis of written argumentative discourse according to the Theory of Rhetorical Structure by Mann and Thompson (1988). As part of a research in Contrastive Rhetoric and after the analysis of a corpus of student writing, the written textual model of argumentative discourse may be shown to be divided into six steps:

1. Justification, which enhances the reader's disposition to accept the writer's right to state the thesis of the text.

2. Problem, which represents the core of the text and which engages the interlocutor's cognitive capacity in a problem-solving activity.

3. Elaboration, which deepens the reader's understanding of the problem.

4. Solution, which proposes the procedure to solve the problem.

5. Result, which foresees the consequence of the solution in a hypothetical way.

6. Motivation, which provokes the reader's desire to realize the action proposed as a solution.

Apart from these six rhetorical steps, a number of sub-steps were discovered (Trujillo Sáez, 2001b):

JUSTIFICATION: Definition and Character.

ELABORATION: Reach and Cause-Consequence.

SOLUTION: Proposal and Explanation.

RESULT: Prediction.

MOTIVATION: Pressure on the agent and Desire.

This argumentative textual model, then, responds to the argumentative need and desire to convince and persuade the reader to solve (or contribute to the solution of) a problem. Finally, this textual model has been proved to be appreciated by raters in English and Spanish (Trujillo, 2000), which has taken us to defend its utility for language teaching (Trujillo, 2002 and in press a).

However, as it has already been explained, argumentation is not just a certain textual model, but a cultural-communicative phenomenon. The act through which the addresser intends to act on the addressee's cognitive environment to impel him or her to do something is both communicative and cultural, given that cultural schemata are in play at the communicative (creative-inferential) process (Liu, 1999).

Furthermore, given our definition of interculturality as active participation in communication through critical awareness and analysis, argumentative discourse represents a privileged setting to link language teaching and culture. As suggested by

Habermas (1981), the concept of communicative rationality is related to the capacity of argumentative discourse to create consensus and to transcend subjectivity. Thus, argumentative discourse may favour the consideration of diverse thinking, which will promote the development of our cognitive environment to include other perspectives on a similar problem. This is, for us, the intercultural competence. It is time, then, to discuss some elements of the teaching of argumentative discourse which may support this idea.

ARGUMENTATIVE DISCOURSE AS A TOOL FOR INTERCULTURALITY

So, our proposal could be summarised as follows: argumentation and argumentative discourse allow language teaching aspire to two objectives, the development of communicative competence and of intercultural competence. Two basic elements of communication and interculturality are present in argumentative discourse, namely the cognitive effort of creating arguments which pretend to modify the cognitive environment of our interlocutor's and the attitude on the part of communicators to accept diverse thinking and the possibility of being convinced and/or persuaded by those arguments. That is, argumentative discourse provides the floor to work on those aspects mentioned by Byram, Morgan and colleagues (1994: 16-40) as the objectives of language-and-culture teaching: cognitive and moral development, empathy and attitudes.

Several teaching sequences have been proposed for argumentative discourse. Ruiz Perez et al. (2002) have suggested a three-phase, "guided" sequence for Spanish *Bachillerato* (17-18 years, upper intermediate): 1) Analysis of the text model and study of its characteristics; 2) Writing a text after the give model; 3) Assessment of the product and the process. Cros and Vilá (2002) base their proposal on the different types of arguments and fallacies. Larringan (2002) suggest the use of debates in the classroom paying attention to three "argumentative spaces": conversation space, topic space and task space.

Once again, Dolz (op. cit.: 69) suggests a very interesting teaching sequence. At a first phase the objectives of the sequence are established, a writing project is proposed to the students and they write a first text or draft which they will work on trying to solve difficulties and problems. At a second phase a number of workshops are held, among

which the teacher may consider debates, text analysis, simplified production exercises, games, linguistic exercises (lexical, morphosyntactic and functional units), etc. At a third phase the first draft is revised and rewritten or a completely new text is written.

Our proposal of a basic structure for an argumentative task is inspired in John Dewey's training of reflective thought. John Dewey, perhaps the most important North American pedagogue, considered the relationship between language and thought in his book *How We Think?* (1910), stating that

> The primary motive for language is to influence (through the expression of desire, emotion, and thought) the activity of others; its secondary use is to enter into more intimate sociable relations with them; its employment as a conscious vehicle of thought and knowledge is a tertiary, and relatively late, formation. (1910: 179)

His reflection, then, is totally relevant for the discussion of argumentative discourse as a tool for interculturality (as defined above) and language learning. In particular, his experiential-reflective method (González Monteagudo, 2001: 28) has been a good reference to think of a possible task for argumentative discourse, described with the following steps:

1. Negotiation of a problematic topic (see below "generative topics");
2. Search for information to solve the problem using cooperative organization (see below "cooperative learning")
3. Debate the possible solutions, considering advantages and disadvantages of each proposal;
4. Establish an action outline which may be followed to solve the problem;
5. Produce a written argumentative text to defend the action outline (including planning, drafting and editing).

This framework represents a third-generation task (Vez, 1998: 14) with a humanistic, sociocultural and holistic goal in which the whole personality of the learners must get involved. The learners and the teacher negotiate the topic of the argumentation, study the problem, suggest possible solutions and consider their consequences in group before establishing an action outline and writing it down using the argumentative textual model.

In that sense, argumentative discourse can (and must) be complemented with three teaching strategies which aim at the development of communicative and intercultural competence too. These strategies are cooperative learning, "generative

topics" and critical thinking. These three strategies will be briefly discussed to close the discussion about the use of argumentative discourse for interculturality.

Fathman and Kessler (1993: 128) define cooperative learning as "group work which is carefully structured so that all learners interact, exchange information, and are held accountable for learning." The California Department of Education (2001: 2) also provides a definition of this strategy as follows:

> most cooperative approaches involve small, heterogeneous teams, usually of four or five members, working together towards a group task in which each member is individually accountable for part of an outcome that cannot be completed unless the members work together; in other words, the group members are positively interdependent.

Trujillo (in press b) summarises the different approaches and their relevance to language learning; these approaches (Jigsaw, Student Team Learning, Learning Together, and Group Investigation) may be useful, for example, to implement a culture learning procedure as powerful as fieldwork and ethnographic research (Byram, Morgan and colleagues, 1994; Byram and Fleming, 1998; Byram, Nichols and Stevens, 2001).

The benefits of cooperative learning are also described by Fathman and Kessler (op.cit.: 134):

> Cooperative learning can be an effective classroom management approach for helping students develop social skills, gain a better knowledge of concepts, improve problem solving abilities, and become more proficient in language and communication.

In that sense, cooperative learning and argumentative discourse share two features: They both contribute to the construction of social bonds which are fundamental for interculturality but, at the same time, they contribute to language learning and cognitive development by means of working on a problem and its solutions (Johnson, Johnson and Stanne, 2000). That is why cooperative learning complements argumentative discourse.

The second element to pay attention to in relation to argumentative discourse is the concept of "generative topics", an expression coined by Paulo Freire in his classical book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Generative topics are the mechanisms to develop education for freedom, which is called by Freire "problematic education". The modifier "generative" is due to the fact that they have the capacity to generate dialogue, the basic process for education.

The "generative topics" are the learner's representations of ideas, conceptions, hopes, doubts and values in dialectic interaction with their opposite (Freire, ibid., 123) and thus are not distant from the well-known concept of need and interest analyses of language teaching. However, whereas need and interest analyses are described in "neutral" terms as the description of the learners' perceived reasons to study the language, generative topics are problematic from the start because they represent those ideas which are at the core of society and individual. In that sense, school recovers a number of topics which had been abandoned as problematic, leaving students without the possibility of school-mediated, structured, rational interpretation; furthermore, as soon as the school neglects its role as "a process of social control and social engineering" (Vez, 2001: 16), these topics, with all their socializing power, are taken by structures of ideological control such as the media, which do not (cannot) develop the critical look on social inequalities and injustices.

Coming back to language teaching practice, these generative topics are the result of a research and negotiation process shared by the learners and the teacher, who must analyse their "topical universe" to discover their generative topics. Through dialogue, learners and teachers must make a list of all those topics which they may be worried about. These, then, will become the problems around which argumentative discourse will be organized. So, generative topics will be both the object of and the motivation for argumentation.

Finally, this outline of the possibilities of argumentative discourse for interculturality would not be complete if we were not to refer to critical thinking. Critical thinking is understood here as "purposeful, self-regulatory judgement which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, methodological, methodological, criteriological or contextual considerations upon which that judgement is based." (Facione, 1990, p. 2) For the sake of educational implementation it would be wise to talk about a disposition towards critical thinking, which means being open-minded, analytical, systematic, inquisitive, judicious, truthseeking and confident in reasoning (Facione, 1998, p. 8).

In that sense, critical thinking is a cognitive process, a lighthouse which indicates at the same time where the problem is and the way to solve it. For example, this double role of critical thinking in argumentative discourse may be shown as reflection in relation to media literacy (among others, Martínez-Salanova, 1999; D'Elia, 2000; Area Moreira y Ortiz Cruz, 2000; Trujillo Sáez y Ayora Esteban, 2002) and as

action in group discussions (Nussbaum, 1999). In our case, the textual model of argumentative discourse presented above includes three moments for critical thinking: elaboration, which makes it possible to deepen our understanding of the problem; solution, where the procedures to solve the problem are shown; and result, where the consequences of the solution are foreseen. Critical thinking, then, is both an integral part of argumentative discourse and a fundamental element of interculturality as defined here.

Furthermore, critical thinking and argumentation may lead language teaching from skill instruction to emancipating education. Considering education not only as the reproduction of knowledge but, basically, as an instrument for understanding and transforming reality, Ayuste et al. (1994) establish the objectives of education as the creation of optimal situations for intersubjective dialogue to take place under democracy and equality conditions. Doubtless, the strategies proposed here, interculturality, argumentative discourse, cooperative learning, generative topics and critical thinking, can help create that sort of communicative situation.

CONCLUSION

Interculturality is one of the most important single educational objectives of current language teaching. It represents a hopeful point of contact between the individual, school curriculum and society. However, definitions of culture and interculturality which still represent societies as watertight compartments do not contribute to wider understanding and better relationships. In that sense, a dynamic definition of culture must be related to a new definition of interculturality, here described as active participation in communication, geared by diversity awareness and critical attitude and practice.

The gap between intercultural theory and practice in language teaching can be filled in with the help of argumentation and argumentative discourse. A task-based framework has been suggested, based on three complementary ideas, cooperative learning, generative topics and critical thinking. This framework can help develop both intercultural and communicative competence, which only for the sake of clarity can be mentioned as two different elements of the language curriculum. The real challenge of

language teaching is to make interculturality and communication a whole. That is our challenge and also our responsibility.

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