

# Potentials and limitations in the assessment of pluri/intercultural competence

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# Purposes – raise questions (answer them?)

- Intercultural competence
- Some existing ways of assessing
- The value of assessing IC
- Alternative assessment

# Part 1

Intercultural competence  
and  
intercultural communicative competence  
in intercultural communication

# What is IC and what can I do with it?

What is it? - definitions refer to:

- knowledge; skills; attitudes – in some cases, critical reflection

What can I do with it? :

- be 'successful' in communication/interaction (with or without a foreign language)
- act as mediator /ethnographic-interpreter

# What can it do for me?

Related to 'education' / 'Bildung' - self knowledge and self-development

1 Through **necessity** to know self 'as others see us'

→ to improve communication – link to 'usefulness' /success in communication

- To '**know myself**' (me and people like me e.g. teachers OR music-makers OR people who live 'here' etc **i.e. as members of social groups**)
- and to '**know others**' (lawyers OR artists OR people who live 'there' etc.)

2 Through **option** to **reflect critically** on self and others →

# What is Intercultural Communication?

- Teacher and Lawyer talking about an illegal incident in an English school
  - See each other as ‘lawyer Smith’ and ‘teacher Jones’
  - Professional **social** identities with different professional **cultures and discourses** in ‘same’ language
  - [not **personal** identities: John Smith and Peter Jones]
- They need Intercultural competence – across professional cultural boundaries in ‘same’ language

- English lawyer talking to French teacher in English about an illegal incident during a student exchange /visit to an English school
  - See each other as ‘**English** lawyer Smith’ and ‘**French** teacher Dupont’
  - Professional social identities with different cultures and discourses AND **DIFFERENT LANGUAGES**
  - [not **personal** identities: John Smith and Jacques Dupont]

In **both** examples:

- Social identities are prominent/salient
- And so are stereotypes, prejudices, different discourses/pragmatics ...

# Purpose of [teaching] IC and ICC

**To overcome stereotypes, prejudices and other barriers to understanding, and communicate well people need:**

Either 3<sup>RD</sup> PERSON: **ICC MEDIATOR WITH IC + LANGUAGE** take a 'third position' i.e. seeing both perspectives and relationship between them

- Or Or **THEY NEED TO BE THEIR OWN MEDIATOR**

Where both speak 'the same' language:

**Intercultural competence (IC) –**

2 people using **same** language to interact and their group identities are **salient** -

OR ... where they speak 'different' languages:

**Intercultural **communicative** competence (ICC)-**

2 people [as above] but using a **different** language to interact and their group identities are **salient**

# Part 2

## Assessment of Intercultural [Communicative] Competence

# Can Intercultural Competence be assessed?

“Yes”

→ there are tests available ... FOR IC but not ICC [i.e. language not assessed]

Online tests e.g. [idiinventory.com](http://idiinventory.com)

Reviews e.g. <http://crlt.umich.edu/interculturalcompetence>

- Fantini, A. 2009. “Assessing Intercultural Competence: Issues and Tools. In D. K. Deardorff (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

**BUT ...**

## 2 views on assessment

For example

- CEFR/CV – competence is scalable with pre-determined criteria
- Liddicoat and Scarino – ‘criteria emerge from the judging process itself’

# 'Progress' in IC :

## Can I become better – on a scale?

- More knowledge
  - about... - a social group (e.g. lawyers and their discourse)
  - about... - what facilitates and hinders intercultural communication (e.g. prejudice, turn-taking etc.)
- More skills and more skilled
  - Listening, observing, comparing, analysing, evaluating, critiquing
- 'More' attitudes
  - From openness to curiosity to respect - a progression(?)

Based on Deardorff 2006, Byram 1997 – see Spitzberg and Changnon 2009

# Scales for pluricultural competence - CEFR Companion Volume (2020) [www.coe.int/lang-CEFR](http://www.coe.int/lang-CEFR)

“Pluricultural competence” – “descriptors for intercultural competence are included”

- “The reason for associating descriptors in this area with CEFR levels is to provide **support to curriculum developers and teachers** in their efforts
  - (a) to **broaden the perspective of language education** in their context and
  - (b) to acknowledge and **value the linguistic and cultural diversity of their learners**” (p.124)

My question: Is assessment main purpose?

# [CEFR Companion Volume]

My comments:

- Scales imply absolutes/non-context-specific progression – do they predict degree of ‘success’ in specific situations ?
- Connection with language competence – implied but not specified  
e.g. Level B1 : Can discuss the objectivity and balance of information and opinions expressed in the media about their own and other communities.
- Also: ACFTFL can-do: <https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/ncssfl-actfl-can-do-statements>

# OR : Liddicoat and Scarino 2020

- Communication = making/exchanging/interpreting meanings in specific events/ moments/ situations:
  - ‘developing intercultural understanding is **more** about **constructing a relationship between participants** in an interaction **than** using culture and language as **static explanatory elements**’ [e.g. talk about school incident]
- Connection with language competence – ‘the intercultural is (therefore) relational and is **fundamentally linked** to language’
- ‘success’ dependent on more than knowledge, skills, attitudes, critical awareness
  - **every situation different**
- If assessment is ‘evaluation of success’, then **no pre-determined criteria or scales can predict degree/level of success**

HOWEVER ...

[my comments]

- Knowledge, skills, attitudes and critical awareness can be **assessed** as **potential not guarantee** for success
  - competence not performance

[AND we assume knowledge, skills, attitudes, critical awareness can be **taught and learnt.**]

And then ....

## Problem of performance and competence

### GENERAL:

- Only performance can be assessed
- Competence is inferred from performance (but future performance not guaranteed)

### SPECIFIC TO INTERCULTURAL

- Performance can be 'insincere' e.g. in attitudes
- Performance is (nearly) always 'inter' and depends not only on assessee

# If it is so difficult, why assess?

- Because all learning should be assessed ... - formative, summative etc
- To introduce IC and make it 'serious'
  - Policy/curriculum makers - use assessment to **introduce curriculum change**
  - **Washback effect** on pupils and teachers
  - **Forward effect** on employers and gatekeepers to further education [' the crucial extra certificate ...]
  - CAN ONLY BE DONE WITH HIGH STAKES ASSESSMENT (?)
- BUT – ethical issues – assessing attitudes [→workshop]

## Part 3

# Alternative assessment

# Alternative 1. Self- assessment

[Example in workshops]

- Addresses ethical issues
- Better on validity – record multiple specific **performances** over time.
- Usable for high stakes?

## Alternative 2. Don't assess!

AND use other means to make 'serious' at least for learners (and therefore teachers)

e.g. Kramersch:

The relentless demand for testing, scoring and ranking **serves institutions** – e.g. schools, businesses, immigration services – that need to **include and exclude**, but they do not necessarily serve the needs of education. [...] We should **then measure what can legitimately be measured** and refuse to measure **the rest**, even though it is **essential that we teach it**.

OR - Can self-assessment do this? An empirical question!

# To conclude ...

- Many issues – no generalisable answers – only specific positions
- My position ...
  - Assessment cannot be ignored – **despite ethical issues**
  - Assessment of **success of an (real-life) event** – not an option in education
  - **Achievement assessment** of teachable knowledge skills attitudes and criticality – desirable but **ethically problematic**
  - **Self-assessment** combined with teacher assessment – feasible and desirable AND needs to become 'serious'
- Your position?

# Bibliographic starting points

- Spitzberg, B and Changnon, G. (2009) Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence. In: D. Deardorff (ed) *Sage Handbook of Intercultural Competence*. London: Sage.
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- Liddicoat, A. and Scarino, A. (2020) Assessing intercultural language learning. In J. Jackson (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication* 2nd ed. London: Routledge.