

Critical turns in language and intercultural communication pedagogy: The simple-complex continuum (*simplicity*) as a new perspective

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Interculturality: Towards the ‘rolling’ and ‘pitching’ of the human

The 2010s and their specific geopolitical and economic characteristics – repeated economic woes, ‘migrant crises’, increasing social injustice, etc. – mark an era where renewing debates as well as epistemological, theoretical, and methodological discussions about interculturality is fundamental. The multifaceted field of language and intercultural communication pedagogy, as one of the main educational channels for reflecting on and acting upon interculturality, should be at the forefront of these discussions and lead to further dialogues between and among researchers, practitioners, ‘users’, decision makers and the general public. Too often intercultural communication has been treated as a neutral transactional encounter during which different groups interact with each other facing language barriers and cultural misunderstandings. Often this view ignores the fact that the ‘intercultural’ also encompasses and contributes to unbalanced power relations between these groups based on gender difference, social class, religion, etc.; differential treatment based on origins, languages, skin colours; but also different kinds of -isms such as racism and culturalism (or the use of a solid form of culture as the only explanation for what people do and think) (Holliday, 2010; Hoskins & Sallah, 2011).

Recent scholarship on the ‘intercultural’ in teacher education, applied linguistics, communication studies, health care, amongst others, but also indirectly in fields such as anthropology, sociology and social psychology can help us to expand the *critical turns* that the notion has already experienced in language and intercultural communication pedagogy (Layne & Lipponen, 2014; Itkonen, Talib & Dervin, 2015). I use the phrase critical turn in its plural form because, even though there are some similarities in the way the ‘intercultural’ is being revised in our field (anti-essentialism, constructivist perspectives, putting the concept of power at the centre of the ‘intercultural’), there is no real consensus on the proposed shifts and aims. It is important to note at this stage that the boundaries between the aforementioned domains are often blurry when it comes to borrowing and mixing theories, concepts and methods. This is why, in this chapter, I have opted for interdisciplinary discussions rather than limiting myself to e.g. language education or intercultural communication education. I also believe that a detour via the arts (literature and performance) is essential to enrich our views on language and intercultural pedagogy.

Although there seems to be an increasing mutual understanding of what interculturality entails and of past ‘bad’ practices, especially amongst researchers (see Holliday, 2010; Piller, 2010; Zhu Hua, 2016), I have argued that interculturality can still appear to be a theoretical and methodological fiction in education and political discourses (Dervin, 2015). As such the notion can be empty yet polysemic, and a victim of groupthink. It can also be easily manipulated and used to fit our own biased

descriptions of today's encounters. For example, in their 2015 article, Lahdesmäki and Wagener reveal how the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue published in 2008 by the Council of Europe emphasizes unified (Western) views for the governance of diversity and embraces power hierarchies by using empty signifiers such as the 'intercultural' and 'culture'. There is thus an urgent need to continue revising our understanding and principles of interculturality and to give more strength to the critical turns of the last years.

I am personally interested in the following issues: Who does the intercultural describe today? Who is 'in' and 'out' in the *inter-* of interculturality? Who decides? (How) can we really move beyond the forms of *terra firma* that the notion has tended to lead to by boxing people into cultures, religions, identities, languages and im-/explicitly leading to hierarchies? (How) could one thus 'get used to the rolling and pitching', the instability of human life and avoid the usual 'fixed points of attachment for thought and existence' (Bergson, 1934, p. 138) that some approaches to the intercultural have led to? Finally idealizing having often been a component of the recent critical turns as a response to errors of the past (e.g. one can experience intercultural encounters beyond essentialism), how could we approach interculturality from a more realistic perspective?

In this chapter I provide some answers to these questions by proposing a realistic and 'simplex' (simple + complex) approach to the intercultural as opposed to an idealizing complex one. I first review principles in working on the 'intercultural' that the recent critical turns have addressed and pinpoint issues that still deserve our full attention. The rest of the article explains what simplicity means in reference to the 'intercultural' and suggests three simplex principles that could enhance the current critical perspectives in the conclusion.

Principles in working on the 'intercultural'

Culture: An enemy of the intercultural?

Many of the concepts, still in use to deal with interculturality, can sometimes appear to be 'old' and 'tired' (Dervin & Machart, 2015). While they have been renewed or even discarded in other fields dealing with the intercultural without using the notion itself (e.g. anthropology, see Starn, 2015), many of these concepts remain unproblematized and unchallenged in language and intercultural communication pedagogy, both in research and practice. My main concern with these concepts is that they tend to be 'anthropomorphic' (human characteristics are attributed to objects and concepts) in the sense that they are used as if they had a mind of their own, their own beliefs and ideologies, ignoring the fact that concrete and 'real' individuals rest behind them (see Abdallah-Preteceille, 1986). In other words people disappear behind these concepts. A good example is the use of phrases such as *communicating with other cultures, cultures meeting cultures, interacting with the Muslim community, etc.* (see such problematic uses in e.g. Bender-Szymanski, 2013). In the field of intercultural pedagogy such uses are also widespread: 'the willingness to engage with the foreign culture', 'critical engagement with the foreign culture under consideration and one's own'. My question is: *Where are the people in these utterances? Who speaks for them through these anthropomorphic words?*

One of the most problematic concepts is contained in the very idea of the intercultural: *culture*. Although the concept has been de-re-constructed and deemed potentially counter-productive as it can easily lead to the fixing of traits, habits and opinions and essentialism, it is still very much present in research on the intercultural in pedagogy. As such *culturespeak* (Hannerz, 1999) or the uncritical and small-minded way of using the word is still a major problem. Discourses on culture can easily lead to create dichotomies which might emphasize that some people are ‘good’ while others are ‘bad’; some are ‘civilised’ some ‘uncivilised’. In the field of intercultural communication scholars like E.T. Hall (1963), Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1994) and Hofstede (1980), which Holliday call the ‘Hofstedian legacy’ (Holliday, 2010, p. 6; see McSweeney, 2002 on Hofstede), have tended to rely on the accumulation of knowledge about different cultures, often used synonymously with knowledge about ‘nations’. They often lead to stereotypes or simple categorizations, rather than attempting to reflect the complexity of intercultural actors and situations (McSweeney, 2002). The ambiguous use of the word by one of the most influential scholars of language and intercultural communication pedagogy, Michael Byram, has been noted for example in Hoff’s (2014) critical discussion of Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence in the light of *Bildung* theories (see also Dervin, 2011). She argues that, while some aspects of *Bildung* are to be found in Byram’s model, Byram’s strong emphasis on harmony, agreement and culture gives it a lower profile than one would expect. The model is still very much dependent on culture as a national entity, ignoring the current critical turns in the field.

Adrian Holliday (2010), amongst others, has shown how discourses of culture can easily lead to moralistic judgments. For instance the usual do’s and don’ts lists of cultural habits, which may look harmless, often hide negative views about the other and sometimes, about the self. These discourses also tend to allow people to easily blame ‘their’ culture or that of the other for what they do or think (Phillips, 2006). Maybe like many anthropologists have noted, the concept of culture is often used to talk about other continents and cultures, while e.g. the word *society* is preferred to talk about ‘us’ (Eriksen, 2001).

Although culture has been described as a social construct rather than a static element (Jahoda, 2011), discourses of culture can also tend to prescribe how people should be. For some people the weight of culture expectations is said to be so heavy that it is impossible for them to ‘free’ themselves from it (see questions such as: ‘where are you *really* from?’; ‘you can’t understand because you were not born in this country’; ‘do you feel more English than Chinese?’, etc.). This biologization of culture, i.e. culture is in ‘their’ blood, their DNA and controls ‘them’, is evident for example in the following headlines about two murders that I identified in a British newspaper on the same day in 2014:

You will die now’: Husband, 76, ‘tried to stab his Russian wife to death because she hogged the bed sheets and left him with cold feet

Pictured: The Pakistani immigrant who beat his wife to death in their New York apartment because she made him the wrong dinner – but his lawyer claims that’s just his culture

While the first piece of news reports that an Englishman killed his Russian wife because he was ‘crazy’, the second one promptly explains that a Pakistani immigrant ‘beat his wife to death’ because of ‘his culture’ (note how the phrase “that’s just his culture” objectivizes him, in other words: it was not his fault but his culture). There is a clear bias here related to discourses on self and other, where the British self is based on the *rational-crazy* continuum while the other is not even depicted as being in control (see Riitaoja, 2013 about similar assumptions in Finnish education). There are clear issues here to do with overgeneralization and negative stereotyping. In his book *Communicating Racism*, van Dijk (1987) shows how such discourses, especially media discourses, contribute to the spread, reproduction and acceptance of prejudice – even if people do not have experiences with the ‘other’. He also explains that these topics implicitly express the ‘hidden concept-pair of superiority and inferiority’ (ibid.: 386). In a similar vein the postcolonial educationalist Vanessa Andreotti (2011) sees in such instances the hostility to the ‘other’ from dominant Western epistemologies based on the project of European Enlightenment humanism. In her analyses of educational policies and practices in the UK, Andreotti shows that the ‘other’ is often used to validate ‘our’ superiority. I argue that discourses of culture in language and intercultural communication pedagogy face the same issues if we continue to biologize the concept for the ‘other’.

In her now famous Ted Talk called *The danger of a single story*, Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) opposes biased approaches to culture when she recalls a discussion about one of her novels. For her it is clear that pre-conceived ideas, ignorance/knowledge about the Other but also geopolitics influence the way we talk about self/other. She says:

I recently spoke at a university where a student told me that it was such a shame that Nigerian men were physical abusers like the father character in my novel. I told him that I had just read a novel called *American Psycho* - (Laughter) - and that it was such a shame that young Americans were serial murderers. (Laughter) (Applause) Now, obviously I said this in a fit of mild irritation. (Laughter).

Although there is obvious irony in her tone it is clear that discourses on culture can easily create imaginary and biased ‘abyssal lines’ (de Souza Santos, 2007). These lines, as in the above examples, can also generate ethnocentrism (the belief that one’s group is better than others): in the case of the English newspaper above, the Englishman is simply insane while the Pakistani man does not even have sanity/insanity but is ‘led’ by his culture like a robot; for Adichie, the image of the violent African man appears ‘natural’ to her American interlocutor. By teaching our students to question such ideological constructions of culture, language and intercultural communication pedagogy can contribute to intensify and consolidate the already established critical layers. In Dervin and Hahl (2015) we report on how we trained student teachers in an English-medium teacher education programme in Finland to develop such skills. By examining how the students worked with a Portfolio of Intercultural Competences (PIC) that reflected their learning, we demonstrate that such skills can be developed and reinforced – bearing in mind that they can be unstable (see below).

At the beginning of this article I argued that there is urgency for us language and intercultural communication specialists to push even further our critiques of the intercultural. The example of the concept of culture shows that potentially negative consequences can occur. The uncritical and a-reflexive use of the concept of culture can first of all lead to *symbolic violence*, whereby the outsider (outcast) is always compared to the ‘imagined’ ‘better’ insider (*you don’t belong to my culture, you are not like us; People from that culture cannot understand us*). The insider only can decide who becomes part of the inner circle, why and how. The second consequence leads to the *biologization of the past and of the frontier*, whereby some people remain ‘foreign sinners’ (Rushdie, 2013) forever (as if it were in their blood or DNA) and for whom their ‘original’ culture and language seem to be so ingrained in their skin that they are said not to be able to ‘integrate’ or ‘acculturate’, and to become like ‘us’. *Bovaryism* (in reference to the novel by G. Flaubert in which a bourgeois lady, dissatisfied with her privileged life, dreams of a better life) can also emerge from discourses of culture. It corresponds to ‘the tendency to see oneself as other than one is, and to bend one’s vision of other people and things to suit this willed metamorphosis’ (Jenson, 2006, p. 167). Bovaryism can be found in comments on culture (‘in my culture we...’), nation-state (ethnocentrism, believing that one’s nation is better than others) but also language (as in: ‘the French language is more logical than other languages or Finnish is one of the most difficult languages in the world’). Bovaryism works hand in hand with symbolic violence and biologization. Finally, and this is probably the most worrying aspect, *neo-racism* is a common implicit or explicit consequence of discourses of culture. They can too easily become a substitute for race and lead to discrimination, denigration and a superiority complex.

There is thus a desperate systematic need to unearth, deconstruct and revise concepts that can contribute to treating others unfairly or to denigrate them, as the aforementioned consequences show. Discarding some of these concepts can also make critical turns more operational. Many scholars have used e.g. the infanticide metaphor of ‘throwing the baby with the bathwater’ in order to defend the concept of culture and to beg for it to be kept in pedagogy (Ogay & Edelman, 2011). I disagree with this view and have tried in my research and practice to move beyond culture and to use it parsimoniously and critically.

Renewing beliefs about the ‘intercultural’

Dealing with interculturality in language and intercultural communication pedagogy not only requires questioning the concepts that we use but also to problematize our own beliefs.

The first aspect relates to a bias that has affected research on intercultural pedagogy since the beginning. I have labeled it the *differentialist bias*, or an obsession with what makes us different from others, rather than considering the fact that we are different and share commonalities. The essentialisation and marketization of the other, the ‘exotic’ other (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009), have insisted on how different s/he is. Anecdotally, in 2012, the influential American singer-songwriter, Pharrell Williams, created a capsule collection for a Japanese casual wear retailer entitled *I am OTHER*. One of his creations read: “The same is lame”, revealing the bias that I am describing here. Research and practice have not been immune to this incredibly resilient groupthink, often collecting lists of differences to either explain or facilitate

intercultural encounters in education. For example, in their book *Managing Cultural Differences*, Harris, Moran and Moran (2011) only dedicate 12 pages to ‘intercultural similarity’. Of course differences matter and people are different (across and within ‘cultures’) but they can also be quite similar in their values, ideas, behaviours, opinions, etc. In many cases two individuals from different ‘cultures’ might share more in common than people from the same country. The obsession with difference seems to relate to a fear of universalism and ethnocentrism and to ‘drown’ the other in the self (Abdallah-Preteuille, 1986). Yet starting critically and reflexively from similarities rather than differences might open up new vistas for both research and practice. The educationalist M. Abdallah-Preteuille (1986) shares the view that identifying similarities might be a more rewarding intellectual and relational exercise than mere difference as it requires spending quality time with people and in-depth discussions – which, in an increasingly busy world or even school contexts, often lacks.

Another related issue is – as hinted at earlier – an overreliance on culture and language as single analytical categories and sole markers of interculturality. Many fields of research such as sociology, cultural studies and Black Feminism, have delved into the benefits of a major paradigm of research called intersectionality to complexify their analyses and to make sure that research participants can shift the boxes that scholarly work can sometimes impose on them. McCall (2005, p. 1771) defines intersectionality as ‘the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations’. Examining interculturality from an intersectional position demands taking into account the combination and interrelation of elements such as language, social status, gender, etc.

In the following excerpt, Adichie (2014) shows how identity politics can benefit from opening up discussions about categorizations:

I was once talking about gender and a man said to me, ‘why does it have to be you as a woman? Why not you as a human being?’ This type of question is a way of silencing a person’s specific experiences. Of course I am a human being, but there are particular things that happen to me in the world because I am a woman. This same man, by the way, would often talk about his experience as a black man (To which I should probably have responded: Why not your experiences as a man or as a human being? Why a black man?).

Defined as examining the interconnected nature of social and ‘biological’ categorizations/identity markers such as language, race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion etc. (Collins, 1986) intersectionality is interested in how these elements, when combined together, contribute or not to injustice, inequalities, discrimination and disadvantage. According to Hoskins and Sallah (2011, p. 114) work on e.g. intercultural competence has often ignored such aspects to concentrate solely on the ‘easy’ and often ‘a-political’ aspect of cultural difference. Intersectionality could help us to discuss the wider structural forces of e.g. ‘capitalism, racism, colonialism, and sexism’ in intercultural contexts (ibid.), to examine the impact of power differentials from a more multifaceted perspective, and to ‘individualize’ analyses of intercultural encounters rather than generalizing them based only on culture/ethnic identity. Finally this could allow intercultural learners to get engaged in more political perspectives by

intersecting ‘fights’ that matter to them (e.g. the rights of women) and those related to less significant aspects to them (e.g. race, language).

The last principle relates to the typical ignoring of contexts and interlocutors in intercultural pedagogy. The belief in individuals’ discourses as discourses of ‘truth’ remains a problem in our field. If, as seems to be accepted by many critical voices (Piller, 2010; Holliday, 2010), identity and culture are constructs that involve speaking to interlocutors in specific macro- and micro-contexts then this should be increasingly problematized in relation to researchers’ and practitioners’ positioning. By their presence and utterances researchers themselves contribute to their participants ‘doing’ interculturality and identitying with them. Thus what they express cannot but be separated from the researchers, who are not invisible subjectivities (see Dervin & Risager, 2014). If researchers do indeed contribute to politics of identity, it means that we need to look into the concept of power. As such if we are not careful enough, we might contribute to essentialising and othering our participants. In the different subfields of Intercultural Communication and Education the way participants are selected is often biased: they are selected based on their nationality, leading to ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003). The latter refers to the general a-critical acceptance that nation-states are reliable units for intercultural comparisons (ibid.). If researchers have not looked into other populations, drawing general conclusions about a people can result in othering. One interesting contribution for interculturality is that of Michelle Fine, who proposed to ‘work the hyphen’ in research: ‘By working the hyphen, I mean to suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the context we study and with our informant, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations. I mean to invite researchers to see how these “relations” between get us “better” data, limit what we feel free to say, expand our minds and constrict our mouths, engage us in intimacy and seduce us into complicity, make us quick to interpret an hesitant to write’ (Fine, 1998, p. 72). The scholar also suggests that by doing so researchers are able to discuss with the research participants ‘what is, and is not, “happening between,” within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence’ (ibid.: 72). Dialogue around the act of researching within research is, therefore, essential. I believe that it would help us to go beyond mere ‘ventriloquation’ (i.e. appropriating others’ words for one’s use and purpose) of our participants’ discourses (Valsiner, 2002). As such, many intercultural studies create narratives, and do storytelling based on what the participants asserted during the interviews. This is very problematic as such approaches tend to objectivize interaction and the impact of context, situation, and interlocutors but also of contradictions, ‘lies’, power-led discourses, co-constructed utterances, etc. The participants’ words then become the ‘truth’, even though, because of, for example, power differentials, it may not be their ‘truth’. For Gillespie, Cornish, Aveling, and Zittoun (2007, p. 38), ‘the individual will internalize the voices of many different, even conflicting, communities’. If we take these words for granted without problematizing the many and varied voices, then are we doing a service to our participants and the ‘groups’ they represent?

I believe that this is a major challenge to research and practice on interculturality: the end of ‘truths’ must be accepted and taken into account. At the moment too much intercultural research relies on narratives as ‘objective’ and ‘truthful’ accounts. Of course the voice of the participants must be respected but when this voice is

multivoiced (and includes contradictions and intersubjectivities; Gillespie, 2012) we need to beware of simplifying our work by over-relying on ‘their’ truths as ‘evidence’ of something – and contributing indirectly to othering their voices. Examining contradictions and positionings can help us to avoid such caveats (Johansson & Suomela-Salmi, 2011).

Simplexity as an additional critical dimension

Having now listed the kinds of problems that research and practice on interculturality still seem to face in our era of critical turns, this section proposes to attempt moving beyond some of these issues in order to consider the “rolling and pitching”, the instability of human life as described by the process philosopher Henry Bergson (1934) in the introduction to this chapter.

First there is a need to recognize and accept that, as researchers and practitioners, we can only reach a practical simplification of intercultural phenomena, which I have referred to with the portmanteau word *simplexity* (simplicity + complexity = simpl-exity, see Dervin, 2014). Simplexity, an emerging theory in General Systems Theory, philosophy, biology and neurosciences (Berthoz, 2012; Louie, 2009), represents the experiential continuum that every social being has to face on a daily basis. We all need to navigate between simple and complex ideas and opinions, when we interact with others. It means that we often end up contradicting ourselves, not being sure about what we think, adapting our discourses to specific situations and interlocutors, using ‘white lies’ to please the other, etc. Sometimes what we say shows some level of complexity (e.g.: ‘I believe that everybody has multiple identities’/ ‘I don’t believe in stereotypes’), which can quickly dive back into the simple (‘but I think that Finnish people are this or that’). Neither simplicity nor complexity can thus be fully reached and what might appear simple can easily become complex and vice versa. The idea of complexity has recently been ‘hijacked’ in relation to the intercultural to make us believe that as researchers, thinkers and/or educators we can avoid falling into the traps of essentialism, culturalism or other forms of -ism. I personally believe that this is an illusion – maybe a dangerous illusion, which can make us feel too contented about our work.

As hinted at earlier, ‘us’ and ‘them’ consist of so many and varied identifications that it is impossible (and uninteresting) to determine what is sincere, authentic and individual in how people define who they are, their culture, their community. Self’s and other’s thoughts, feelings and actions are ‘populated’ by a collection of different characters (Watkins, 2000, p. 2) to whom as researchers and practitioners we do not have access. So when we conduct research on e.g. language learners or students of intercultural communication we need to make sure that as many of these ‘populations of voices’ are enabled and allowed to emerge in our discussions with them. It is also important to note that in order to free our participants from symbolic violence we need to discuss our own contribution to interactional power differentials that we might bring to the field: us researchers as native speakers of the language used during interviews; us as potentially privileged ‘white’ individuals; us as ‘possessors’ of the context (for example if an interview takes place at university) and us as ‘professional speakers’ who can manipulate discourses. This means that we need to place ‘renewed’ moral and ethical reflections at the centre of our work and practice in language and intercultural communication pedagogy. One important aspect also consists in

systematically questioning our own ideologies and the judgments that go with them.

This leads me to my second point about simplicity which interrelates. Interculturality is too often viewed as a miraculous technology that can help people to learn to ‘respect other cultures’ and ‘be tolerant of others’. Yet there is a need to admit that intercultural phenomena – like other ‘human’ phenomena – cannot always be grasped, controlled and/or explained. This is not a case of ‘laziness’ but intellectual honesty. Unfortunately in today’s neo-liberal education ‘intellectual honesty can easily pass as incompetence’ (Claessens, 2013). We thus need to consider *failure* (of our research, practices, encounters, etc.) as a potential component of intercultural practice and research. In a world obsessed by success (Rubens, 2009; Kavanagh, 2012), this is a major challenge. In a 2015 message, Sjur Bergan, Head of the Education Department at the Council of Europe, showed how institutions like his (and the consultants who work for it) are obsessed with this issue. His message informed us about ambitious ‘Pioneering work on democratic competences to transform the way we live and work’ to be done by the Council (16/03/2015). In it, one discovers that the democratic competences of the title are partnered with *intercultural competences* and defined as ‘the values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding that enable us to participate effectively in today’s diverse democracies’. The use of the adverb *effectively* here is very much reminiscent of the obsession with success. The objective of this ‘pioneering work’ is to find ‘a universal and objective system to define and measure (the) democratic competences [required to promote human rights and citizenship education]’. The choice of the words *universal* and *objective* is quite surprising. Who decides who has these qualities? Aren’t we doomed to fail if we adopt such attitudes? Twenty core competences were also defined by the institution: ‘responsibility, tolerance, conflict resolution, listening skills, linguistic and communication skills, critical thinking, empathy and openness’. These will be measured to e.g. cite ‘levels of attainment for empathy and critical thinking’. To me this represents an illusionary attempt to reach complexity. Can one really measure openness when it is co-constructed between people (one can always pretend to be ‘open’)?

The words of the performance artist, Marina Abramovic (in O’Brien, n.d.), resonate very well with simplicity and the need for failure to be recognized: “You never know how the experiment will turn out. It can be great, it can be really bad, but failure is so important, because it involves a learning process and it enables you to get to a new level and to other ways of seeing your work.” I believe that this is the sort of attitude that researchers and practitioners in the field of intercultural pedagogy need to develop in order to avoid contradictions and delusions. I argue that failure can also help us to work from a more simplex (and modest) approach to interculturality.

Discussion and conclusion

The past years have witnessed an increase in critical perspectives in language and intercultural communication pedagogy. However the field is actually quite multifaceted and far from unified. Certain problematic approaches still remain. Furthermore a very strong chasm can exist between those who constitute the field (researchers, educators, decision makers, etc.). This chapter has approached critical turns from a ‘modest’ and ‘realistic’ perspective based on the notion of simplicity. It has also reviewed aspects of interculturality that are still problematic in research and

practice of language and intercultural communication pedagogy. Many of these problems derive from the history of the notion of interculturality itself, the associated groupthink and from ‘established’ gurus (Byram, Hofstede, amongst others). They can also emerge from a lack of interdisciplinary discussions and reflexivity.

In conclusion I propose three principles for pedagogy based on the simplex (simple-complex) approach to the intercultural. Some of the principles are already well accepted in the field while others represent what I consider to be realistic perspectives – the recent critical turns have maybe been too ‘idealistic’.

Intercultural pedagogy would benefit from systematically questioning the words, concepts and notions that we use – even those that we criticize – and to strengthen their meanings and to be aware of their drawbacks. We also need to find ways of including those we speak for and avoid speaking over them. For example a word that is often used in the current critical turns is that of *essentialism* (reducing someone to one identity, one essence). An increasing number of researchers and practitioners in intercultural pedagogy set such learning objectives as *helping students to use anti-essentialist perspectives to look into interculturality* or even *helping students to meet others beyond essentialism* in their work (Beaven & Borghetti, 2015), exaggerating the power of their perspective. Anti-essentialism is an ideal and a phenomenon that cannot be fully approached. As an interculturalist I can only navigate between essentialism (simple) and non-essentialism (complex) but I cannot reach either poles. Urging students to fall into the naïve trap of full access to non-essentialism is as condemnable as promoting essentialism.

In order to promote simplicity, intercultural pedagogy should lead learners to work from a perspective that concentrates on the co-construction of discourses, identities, self/other, and paying attention to dialogical positions (Gillespie, 2012). It should also help learners to avoid individualistic perspectives that concentrate on ‘one piece of the jigsaw’ in intercultural encounters (usually only one interlocutor). Interculturality is a negotiated process that relies on various (inter-)texts, discourses, positionings and power differentials. Missing out on one of the interlocutors means ignoring these fundamental principles and representing interculturality with a bias.

Simplexifying learners’ analysis of interculturality in language and intercultural communication pedagogy could also occur by training them to intersect various identity markers and contexts, but also by providing them with tools to question ‘truths’ by going beneath the surface of discourse. Certain forms of discourse analysis, conversation analysis and pragmatics can be very fruitful (Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013). For instance French enunciation/utterance theories can allow us to examine and question the agency and/or positioning of people taking part (in)directly in acts of interaction by identifying “linguistic means (...) through which speakers position themselves, inscribe themselves in the message and situate themselves in relation to it” (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2002: 33). By so doing one can have access to snapshots of simplicity, i.e. when people navigate between the simple and the complex with others.

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