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**CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE  
LEARNING**

**PERSPECTIVAS CRÍTICAS EN EL APRENDIZAJE INTERCULTURAL  
DE LENGUAS**

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*Intercultural language teaching and learning is one manifestation of the critical turn in language education. Its critical dimension is characterised by a strong emphasis on self-reflexivity in both teaching and learning, and by a transformational agenda for language education (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Within language education, the critical project requires that the focus of language learning is to develop social actors capable of using language repertoires in ways that provide for agency both over language (in the choices they make about how to use their language resources) and through language (in the social possibilities they realise for themselves through their language repertoires). Within such a view of education, critical reflection comes to play an important role. To consider language education in such a way requires reconceptualising some of the fundamental starting assumptions of language education, which provides a basis for creating new emphases in both theory and practice. This article begins by examining the nature of this reconceptualisation and then*

*examines the consequences of such reconceptualising for teaching and learning. It examines data from language learners to exemplify the forms of learning involved in this manifestation of the critical turn in language education.*

**Key words:** *Intercultural language learning, language learning, critical approach*

*La enseñanza y el aprendizaje intercultural de lenguas es un ejemplo del cariz crítico que se ha adoptado en la enseñanza de lenguas. Su dimensión crítica se caracteriza por un fuerte énfasis en la reflexión personal tanto en la enseñanza como en el aprendizaje, así como por una aproximación transformadora (Liddicoat y Scarino, 2013). En el ámbito de la enseñanza de lenguas, el objetivo esencial consiste en que el enfoque del aprendizaje de lenguas se centre en desarrollar individuos capaces de usar repertorios lingüísticos de manera que sean sujetos activos tanto en el uso del lenguaje (en las elecciones que hacen sobre cómo usar sus recursos lingüísticos), como a través del lenguaje (en las posibilidades sociales que alcanzan por sí mismos a través de sus repertorios lingüísticos). Dentro de esa visión de la educación esta reflexión crítica juega un papel importante. Considerar la enseñanza de idiomas de esa manera requiere reconceptualizar algunos de los supuestos tradicionales de la educación de idiomas, lo que proporciona una base para crear nuevas áreas de actuación en la teoría y en la práctica. Este artículo comienza examinando la naturaleza de esta reconceptualización para seguidamente examinar las consecuencias de dicha reconceptualización para la enseñanza y el aprendizaje. Este estudio examina los datos recopilados con estudiantes de idiomas para ejemplificar las formas de aprendizaje patentes en esta enfoque crítico en la enseñanza de lenguas.*

**Palabras clave:** *Interculturalidad, aprendizaje de lenguas, enfoque crítico*

## **1. Criticality in Language Education**

Recent work in language education has sought to address the criticism that language pedagogy has been largely an untheorised endeavour (Phipps & Levine, 2012) and that theorisation is needed if language education was to be able to achieve the complex demands for language use in contemporary

contexts of globalisation, mobility and international connectedness. One way of addressing the theoretical gap in language pedagogy has been to investigate the critical dimension of language teaching and learning and the role of language education in fostering criticality (Dasli & Díaz, 2017; Díaz, 2013; Liddicoat, 2017; Pennycook, 2001). Proposals for adopting a critical approach to language are characterised by a strong emphasis on self-reflexivity in teaching and learning, and by a transformational agenda for language education (Liddicoat, 2017).

Such thinking draws from arguments within critical theory on the centrality of education for the critical enterprise. Habermas (1968), for example, theorises learning as fundamental in critical theory – learning is an emancipatory process that enables people to become self-determining social actors. He argues that, in learning, human beings need both knowledge of the world, which is developed through experiences of the world, and the reflective appropriation of human life, which enables understanding of the nature of experience. A part of the appropriation of human life involves transcending the self-referential nature of human thinking; that is, practices of interpretation that conceive experience from one's own perspective only (Habermas, 1992). In order for human beings to come to understand each other they need to create a mutually shared subjectivity, and this subjectivity is a central element in the appropriation of human life. In language education, this appropriation is one that takes place across and between languages and cultures and involves a coming to understand that is created reflectively and reflexively across potential boundaries of language and cultures. Thus, we can conceptualise language learning as an engagement, through language and cultures, in coming to understand linguistically and culturally diverse others. The aim is to come to understanding for oneself rather than to come to a specific point of view about culturally contexted values, practices, etc. (Dasli, 2012). The critical project is not one of assimilation to the culture of the other, but rather a movement beyond self-referentiality towards a multi-perspectival view of human lived experience.

This article will consider criticality in language learning and teaching from an intercultural perspective (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) to identify some consequences of such an orientation when it comes to how we understand the nature and practice of language learning. The article will consider how language educators need to reconceptualise some of the

fundamental starting assumptions of language education as a basis for creating new emphases in both theory and practice. It will also give examples of what a critical perspective may look like in student learning.

## **2. Consequences for Understanding Language Education**

Adopting a critical perspective in language education involves a reconsideration of some key assumptions on which language education practice is based; what we mean by ‘language’, ‘culture’ and ‘learning’ as educators<sup>1</sup>. Conceptualisations of these constructs have significant implications not only for the practice of criticality in language education but also for its very possibility.

### **2.1. Conceptualisations of Language**

The conceptualisation of language is central to the conceptualisation of what is learned in language education. In many conceptualisations of language in language education, the emphasis very rarely moves beyond a focus on the structural system of the language; that is, grammar and vocabulary, or a view of language as a tool for communication as represented through the four macro-skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. The view of communication found in such formulations is however often weak (Eisenclas, 2009) and takes the form of pseudo-communication that is in reality little more than language practice (Ghosn, 2004). Such views of language focus on languages as autonomous entities and construct languages as separable and discrete phenomena. More recent thinking (e.g. Creese & Blackledge, 2015; García & Li Wei, 2014) has critiqued this view of language as having little reality for understanding plurilingualism and plurilingual individuals and has argued that we need to see languages as much more interdependent and interrelated and to focus more on the idea of complex linguistic repertoires. Moreover, rather than placing emphasis solely on languages as a tool kit of elements that can be used for communicative purposes, we need to focus more on language as meaning-making potential (Halliday, 1993) and to consider how languages shape and influence the processes of creating, communicating and interpreting meanings. Moreover, we need to recognise the ‘peopled’ nature of languages; they are not autonomous constructs external to

individual speakers but rather they are embodied in speakers and constituted in contexts of use to communicate personalised meanings relevant to speakers' lifeworlds. Language is thus something that is individual, personal and created in and through communication rather than simply an autonomous system of codified and conventionalised norms (Shohamy, 2006). Language is not only personal but also shared, reflecting common culturally contextualised experiences and expectations about making and interpreting meanings and constructing affinities based around language use. As meaning-making practices, languages are culturally contexted; meaning is not made in isolation from other cultural practices of signification, and conceptualisations of language also need to consider the relationship between language and culture as they function together in the creation and interpretation of meanings (Liddicoat, 2009).

## 2.2. Conceptualisations of Culture

The idea that language and culture work together in creating and interpreting meanings already foreshadows a particular conceptualisation of culture for language learning. In particular, it presupposes a movement away from *culturalism* (Bayart, 2002), which represents cultures as monolithic, essentialised and static, with a particular focus on the nation as the locus of cultural practice towards a view of culture as contingent, created and highly variable, involving individual participation in purposeful social life (Abdallah-Preteille, 1986, 2011; Barbot & Dervin, 2011). This movement also presupposes a shift from viewing culture as a body of knowledge that is transmitted over time to members of a particular group to one that sees culture as a repertoire of resources that are creatively constructed and selectively deployed in order to achieve social goals and to work towards mutual comprehension (Sewell, 1999). That is, culture is a meaning-making resource that allows members of a group to be understood in particular ways and enables them to shape how they and their actions are perceived by others.

Such a way of thinking brings language and culture close together in that both are involved in the creation, communication and interpretation of meanings. It is this emphasis on meaning that brings both language and culture into focus for critical learning, as learning an additional language and its ways of use with a cultural context opens ways of highlighting self-

referential ways of understanding and developing insights into the multi-perspectival nature of meaning and the role of language and culture in shaping how human beings communicate.

The movement away from culturalism to an idea of cultures as repertoires of practices that influence meaning making and interpretation leads to a questioning of how different intercultural communication is from other forms of communication. Often, intercultural communication studies have emphasised meaning breakdown as the main focus of interest and have constructed an image of culture as a problem for communication (Piller, 2011). However, much communication that is not considered intercultural involves coming to understand people who do not share our own experiential and interpretative starting points and human beings regularly engage successfully with diverse others without problems. Holliday argues that communication of necessity involves the creation of small cultures of interaction in which participants come together to interact and in order to do so they need to establish a common set of assumptions about meaning making for the purposes of their interaction (Holliday, 2010, 2016). Thus, intercultural communication can be understood as a constituent part of communication, which always involves reciprocal processes of meaning-making and interpretation, not as a special case of communication characterised particularly by meaning breakdown. There are however some issues that are especially salient in intercultural interactions. The most obvious of these is language; intercultural interactions are usually also interlinguistic and processes of meaning-making and interpretation are inherently linguistic processes (Gadamer, 1960) in which all of the participants' languages will play a role in what is said and how it is understood. A further difference lies in the politics of diversity that provide the context in which intercultural communication takes place. This includes attitudes to and stereotypes about cultural groups, beliefs that a culture may be superior or inferior to others, with associated beliefs about members of cultural groups, etc. (Holliday, 2016). Such beliefs shape how communication occurs and how the participants and their contributions are perceived. The interlinguistic nature of intercultural communication also means that a politics of language may also be involved where participants identify each other as either native- or non-native-speakers of the language. Such identifications influence perceptions of speakers' legitimacy and thus the legitimacy of their contributions and

interpretations (Liddicoat, 2016b; Liddicoat & Tudini, 2013). Such construction of self and other in relation to the language(s) being used raise potential issues of power in intercultural interactions that can profoundly shape how such interactions take place and how they are understood by participants. Such issues become salient in a critical perspective on language learning.

### **2.3. Conceptualisations of learning**

Conceptualisations of learning can be considered from two different perspectives. One is the perspective of the nature of the learning produced through language education; that is, what does it mean to have learned a language? The second is the process through which learning happens; that is, what does it mean to learn when language is the object of learning?

In language education, the product of learning has usually focused on the idea of proficiency understood as what a language learner can do in the language described in relation to an absolute scale (Scarino, 2012). Such understandings of proficiency have tended to focus on the native-speaker as an ideal speaker-hearer and the learner as progressing from less native-speaker-like states to more native-speaker-like states. In such comparisons, the learner is compared with a native speaker who is envisaged as a monolingual and monocultural individual (Kramsch, 1999). In this way, the identity of learner as a plurilingual individual is rendered invisible as the points of comparison are not constructed in plurilingual terms. The object of learning in such comparisons focuses on the structural system of the language, where native speakers are assumed to have some form of complete knowledge and emphasises the accuracy of the learners' knowledge (or lack thereof) rather than the communicative demands of interlinguistic and intercultural communication. The native speaker model thus tends to ignore the fact that plurilingual and pluricultural individuals have needs (and abilities) that native-speakers do not in that they must use the language they are acquiring to communicate using a complex linguistic repertoire with others who may not share the same starting points or interpersonal and interactive practices (Kramsch, 1999). Reconceptualising the product of learning as the ability to communicate interlinguistically and

interculturally means that language as a structural system needs to be seen as just one element of what a learner needs to be able to do and that complex issues of making and interpreting meanings across languages and cultural contexts needs to be given equal attention.

In considering learning as a process, learning theory in language education has often been eclectic and atheoretical (Liddicoat, in press). Where more theorised approaches have been developed, these have usually been drawn from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and have characterised language learning as being different from other forms of learning. One particularly strong orientation in learning theory has been the dichotomy between *acquisition* (unconscious processes of hypothesis formation based on input) and *learning* (conscious processes developing representations of a language) (Krashen, 1981). This view, which underlies Communicative Language Teaching, has effectively downgraded the significance of teaching, which ultimately focuses on a conscious process, and of the interpersonal, as the process of acquisition is seen only in internal cognitive terms. More recent SLA theories have re-emphasised the interpersonal nature of learning drawing on the work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1934/2005), which views learning as socially and culturally situated. In this view, language learning is seen as a process that is achieved through interaction with more competent others, who provide support for development.

In both of these theoretical approaches with SLA, the emphasis has been placed on acquisition of the structural system of the language; that is, the focus of learning is the same, it is only understanding of the process that varies (e.g. Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Swain, Lapkin, Knouzi, Suzuki, & Brooks, 2009). This is perhaps unsurprising as the focus of interest in SLA research has been on the language system rather than on broader issues of language use and the relationship of language with wider processes of meaning making and interpretation. The result of the reliance of language education theory on SLA has thus often been to limit educational thinking to theories of learning specific to the learning of linguistic structures rather than considering wider educative goals. Theories of learning developed outside SLA in the area of general education can offer insights into the nature of learning that can expand how language educators view learning and open prospects for different forms of educational thinking (Liddicoat, in press).



One particularly insightful way of thinking about learning is Sfarid's (1998) distinction between metaphors of learning as acquisition and as participation. The acquisition metaphor emphasises the idea of learning as the assimilation of a body of knowledge. Knowledge is conceived as a commodity and learning as the transfer of this commodity from outside to the learner<sup>2</sup>. The participation metaphor emphasises learning as a way of becoming a member of a community of practice by developing the discursive and behavioural practices required for participation in that community. The participation metaphor presupposes learning as a process of apprenticeship in practices that results in the ability to participate in the community as a fully competent member. While Sfarid identifies two different approaches, she does not seek to identify the better approach but rather argues that a well-developed theory of learning needs to integrate the two, pointing to the need to for complex theories of learning.

Sfarid's model of two metaphors has been expanded by the work of Paavola et al. (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005; Paavola, Lipponen, & Hakkarainen, 2004), who add a third metaphor: knowledge creation. They argue that Sfarid's metaphors assume that knowledge exists before the act of learning but Paavola et al. maintain that knowledge can also be created during learning and students can learn things through processes of discovery that were not previously known by them or by others. They also adopt an additive position, arguing that a well-founded learning theory needs all three metaphors.

Outside SLA, but in the field of language education, Liddicoat and Scarino (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Scarino & Liddicoat, 2016) draw on this work on metaphors of learning to propose the idea of learning as a hermeneutic process. In this view, the learner is seen as an interpreter of meanings working towards understanding through a process of critical reflection on experience. Learning is thus a process of coming to understand experiences. This means that learning is centrally linked to a process of coming to understand the nature of interpretation, what is involved in interpretation, how languages, cultures and experiences shape how people interpret messages and why interpretations can be different for different people. Reflection plays a central role in interpretation as learning, since it is through processes of reflection that learners come to understand things that were previously not understood. Liddicoat and Scarino, like the other theorists discussed above, also argue that this theory of learning is not

intended to displace other theories but needs to be added to other ways of thinking to produce an elaborated view of the nature of learning. Such complex theories of learning are central to a critical project in language education as it is in ideas such as participation, knowledge creation and interpretation that the critical focus of language education lies, but any critical engagement also presupposes working with a body of knowledge as a starting point for critique.

### **3. Critical Reflection in Intercultural Learning**

The hermeneutic view of learning focuses centrally on the idea that knowledge about language in use and the ways it is shaped by its contextualisation in cultures is developed through a process of active construction by learners (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Scarino & Liddicoat, 2016). Active construction means that rather than knowledge being provided by others (such as teachers), learners create for themselves their own understandings of meaning making and interpretation through a process of investigation of their experiences of communication. Interpretative learning requires that each text (written, spoken, visual, multimedia) is understood as an experience of meaning-making whether it is produced or received by the learner. In encountering or sharing meanings in an additional language, learners are placed in situations where they are required either to interpret meanings made by others who do not share the same interpretative resources and expectations, or to produce meanings to be understood by such others. This means that in learning, the language of the text is not only produced or comprehended, but its meaning-making potential is investigated. Learning constitutes an interpretation of the potential meanings present in an experience of communication and opens space for this interpretation to happen according to multiple perspectives such as one's own cultural framings, others' cultural framings, etc.

In each experience of a text, the learner is engaged in a process of intercultural mediation: an interpretive process in which the learner creates meaning in contexts in which meaning does not yet exist or is not yet communicated (Liddicoat, 2014; McConachy & Liddicoat, 2016). This mediation can take place at two different levels. It can involve conveying the meaning of a message for others who do not share the same meaning making and interpretation resources as the author of the message (mediation

for others) or it can involve establishing meaningfulness for oneself where initially meaning was problematic in some way (mediation for self) (Liddicoat, 2014, 2016a). At either level, mediation is a discursive activity that reflects Swain's idea of languaging:

[Languaging] involves the use of language to externalise cognitively complex acts of thinking that involve the learner in a process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language (Swain, 2006, p. 98).

Thus, mediation is a reflexive act in which the mediator constructs new language representations of understanding. The focus of these representations is, however, not only on the meanings present but also on understanding the nature of interpretation and how meanings are made and how these influence the process of interpretation in particular instances of meaning-making. Acts of mediation, as interpretation of other's meanings, require that the mediator moves away from a self-referential stance to come to understand the perspective of others. This does not however mean that self-referential perspectives are abandoned, as they remain relevant in the process of interpretation, but rather than one's own interpretative practices and experiences are brought into relationship with those of others. One's self-referentiality thus becomes one dimension of the interpretative processes, not its totality.

#### **4. Interpretation as Learning: Examples**

The discussion that follows will consider how such acts of mediation are realised by language learners through reflection on their experiences of meaning making and interpretation as they encounter a new language used in culturally contexted ways which create problems to be resolved in the learners' own making and interpretation of meanings.

The first example is taken from a young adult Australian male student learning French in an *ab initio* program in an Australian university. The extract comes from a discussion of his experiences of learning French and the issues that he confronts as a learner. In this discussion, he raised the issue that speaking in French created problems for him in knowing how to construct and represent his identity using the resources presented to him by the new language.

**Example 1: ‘I don’t know how to be me’**

L: The big challenge for me in learning French isn’t really you know grammar and vocab. That’s sort of okay. It’s that I don’t know how to be me in French.

R: What do you mean by that?

L: Well like uhm there’s ways we do things here in Australia and I know that stuff but you can’t just like just do that in French. It’s like the words don’t go together the right way or something.

R: Can you give me an example?

L: Well you now there’s *tu* and *vous*. And so you don’t know what to call people. You have to think about that and I never had to before. It just comes easily in English, but you well you can make a mistake in French. And the uhm the mistake isn’t like just grammar it’s going to affect how you like speak with people and uhm what they sort of think of you.

R: So how’s that a problem for ‘being me’ in French?

L: Okay so you know in Australia you want to be friendly with strangers right? And so that’s how I do things and I think of myself as being friendly.

R: mhm

L: So in French how do you do that? How are you friendly to strangers? Uhm I mean you’ve got *vous* and that doesn’t sound friendly to me, but there’s only some people you can say *tu* to. And if you say *tu* it doesn’t sound friendly cos it could be rude. Like uhm I think I’m a friendly person but I don’t know how to do that in French.

R: So how do you solve that?

L: I don’t know. ((laughs)) For now, it’s like a problem and I’m looking for how to do it. When I talk with people I think about what they do and like see if I can learn from that. But just now I don’t know.

This learner frames his problem with French as not being the more usual issues of grammar and vocabulary – that is, it's not learning the structural system – but rather as an issue of performing the self (Araújo e Sá, Ceberio, & Melo, 2007; Goffman, 1959). He contrasts his knowledge of how to act within his own linguistic and cultural milieu with a lack of knowledge of how to construct such actions in French; the French language does not provide him with the resources he needs to enact his persona (*It's like the words don't go together the right way or something*). When asked for an example, he cites the second person pronoun forms *tu* and *vous* and constructs these as a problem for addressing others because they encode a social relationship that is not encoded in Australian English<sup>3</sup>. He contrasts the ease of establishing relationships in Australian English with a complexity of doing the same with a linguistic system that provides different communicative resources and requires different understandings. At this point, he has not articulated how the pronoun system of French creates a problem for self-presentation, but when prompted begins to express the problem of the pronoun system not as one of understanding the French system but of locating himself within it. He invokes a self-image of friendliness (*in Australia you want to be friendly with strangers right? And so that's how I do things and I think of myself as being friendly*) as being at the heart of his meaning-making challenge. In French, because he needs to select among pronouns that mark the relationship in specific ways, he does not have the linguistic and cultural resources to enact his self-presentation as friendly; he is not able to appropriate human life as it is lived within the interpretative frame of the French language and he needs to make sense of the resources provided by French that will enable him to enact his preferred self-image. He does not view the French language as having the resources he needs: *vous* does not sound friendly, but neither does *tu*. In his account, he constructs the forced choice of pronouns in French as something that is in conflict with his English system where the pronoun system leaves the nature of interpersonal relationships vague. At this point he has not resolved the problem for himself. However, he has identified an issue that is central to his own agency as a speaker; he has begun to reflect on the nature of the problem so as to understand his dilemma, and has become aware of ways in which he can help develop his own reflective appropriation of human life in and through French. He is searching for the resources that will support his own agency as a user of the French language in ways that will allow him to remain faithful to a self-concept developed in a different

linguistic and cultural context that has provided both different expectations and resources for fulfilling them.

The second example is taken from another interview with a young adult Australian male student learning French at the same university and in the same program.

### **Example 2: ‘You do different things with different people**

A: We watched this video in class a few weeks ago. It was a scene from some French show, like a sitcom or something I think. It was like about a family, just talking and getting ready for dinner. And I thought the way they’re talking is funny. It’s not like, you know, not like we’d talk. I mean they were giving each other orders while they did things and no one was saying please or thanks or anything like that . . . You just couldn’t talk like that at my place. My mum’d go ballistic! But like, they were just a normal family. It didn’t look like there was a problem or anything, so I thought, “hey this must be the way people really talk” and that made me think. How come we have to do all this “please” and “thank you” and “could you do whatever?” and they don’t.

R: And what did you come up with?

A: Well, like, I’m not too sure. I guess I was thinking that we need to be a lot politer when we speak. You know, like we speak like that to everyone, your parents, your friends, strangers, anyone. Like we don’t make big differences in how we do this stuff. So uhm perhaps in French, you don’t have to do this. You do different things with different people. Like with your family you don’t have to make so much like effort . . . ’cos you’re close, you live together and that.

In this extract, the student reports finding the way of talking he observed in a video of a family interaction as unusual and difficult to interpret (*And I thought the way they’re talking is funny*). The way of speaking did not match his expectations about the nature of interaction in families and the meanings he interpreted from the language did not bear out his interpretations from

other signs in the video. He constructs the difference as being about the way people made requests and how these differed from his expectations (*I mean they were giving each other orders while they did things and no one was saying please or thanks or anything like that*). For him, such linguistic practices in a family context were unacceptable forms of behaviour that would have caused problems in his own home environment (*You just couldn't talk like that at my place. My mum'd go ballistic!*). At the same time, he was aware that the interaction he was observing did not seem to have any indications that these ways of speaking were problematic and this leads him to an insight – his previous experiences and expectations of family interaction were not adequate for understanding interactions in another linguistic and cultural context. This realisation then produces questions that he needs to be able to answer for himself to understand why the interaction has the form it does in each context (*How come we have to do all this "please" and "thank you" and "could you do whatever?" and they don't*). Although at the moment he has not answered the questions to his satisfaction but, through reflection on the situation, he is formulating a cultural logic that underlies his observations. He does this by expanding his observations beyond the family situation to link it to a wider set of practices that he observes in Australia in which politeness is not differentiated between contexts. He then hypothesises a perspective from within a French context where such differentiation is more to be expected, and frames the logic for this within the nature of the relationship involved. In this example, as in the one above, the learner is using lived experience as a resource for reflection on both his own practices and those found in his experiences of the language he is learning. The experience is not simply lived, but is appropriated through reflection to develop critical insight into both self and other.

Criticality is evidenced in learning where learners are not simply acquiring a language but are using this learning to 'appropriate human life' as plurilingual individuals making meaning with and for others. This appropriation happens when experience involves issues of interpretation that become the basis for reflection, and this reflection allows a movement towards understanding of different enactments of social life. The examples reported above show that, by interpreting their experiences of language, learners can develop new knowledge and awareness of not only language and culture but also of the consequentiality of language and culture for meaning making. Their experiences of language in use are experiences in which languages and cultures are brought into relation, first by dissonance

where interpretation is problematic and later by an understanding that there are different affordances for interpretation available in the new context. They are working towards understanding of linguistically and culturally diverse others and their processes of meaning making and developing this understanding for themselves as ways of accounting for their lived experiences of diversity.

In the examples, the learners are engaging with language as meaning making. This conceptualisation of language as meaning-making is consequential for the ways that learners can begin to engage with a new language and its cultural context. It allows an engagement with meaning as a nuanced, contextualised and emergent process through producing, interpreting and reflecting on meaning. This allows for language to become a resource for the reflective appropriation of human life in that experience becomes transformed through critical insight that enables an emerging understanding both of self and other. These critical insights have the potential to provide resources for agency in interaction; decisions about action are not simply decisions about the grammar and vocabulary to be used but decisions about consequential personal and social issues such as self-presentation and the construction of relationships. These insights thus have the potential to provide learners with resources for decision-making about future communication.

These learners do not experience language simply as a structural system but also as a meaning-making resource that allows or constrains particular ways of acting. They are coming to understand that communication is an action of producing and sending messages that is highly contextualised in languages, cultures, experiences and expectations. Their learning is a process of coming to understand that operates both on the old and the new. They are coming to understand their own previous experiences of making and interpreting meanings in new ways. These experiences and their assumptions about meaning and how it is communicated (that is their self-referentiality) has become an object of reflection that reconstructs them as situated and susceptible of different interpretations and enactments. They are also coming to understand the practices and meanings of newly encountered others, which they not only experience as different, but also appropriate them through their reflection on them and the comparisons they make between different perspectives.



## 5. Concluding comments

Moving towards a critical orientation in language education provides possibilities for different forms of engagement with linguistic and cultural diversity through the process of learning an additional language. Adopting such an orientation is not, however, simply a matter of asking new questions and introducing new focuses in the classroom that can be added onto existing practices. It involves a rethinking of basic concepts and assumptions that shape the foundations of teaching practice. In this way, a critical orientation is not just an element of learning but rather a re-engagement with and re-theorising of what it means to teach and learn a language.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of the reconceptualisation of language culture and learning involved in an intercultural perspective see also Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), Scarino and Liddicoat (2016) and Liddicoat (in press, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> This is thus a different use of *acquisition* from the way it is understood in SLA work based on Krashen's (1981) cognitivist theory.

<sup>3</sup> For more discussion of the problem of encoding relationships in French for English-speaking learners see Liddicoat (2006).

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