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INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES OF UPPER SECONDARY

LEARNERS OF FRENCH

Sylvia Duffy

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

University of Durham

May 2002



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Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to investigate the question of whether learners of French in the upper secondary sector acquire intercultural competencies which are commensurate with their linguistic competencies, during their two-year preparation for the examinations at 'Advanced' level which allow admission to university.

The study has been undertaken in relation to existing literature in the disciplines of foreign language pedagogy, intercultural communication and motivation for foreign language learning. It examines the concept of culture within the teaching of upper secondary French, and recent developments which have led to the concept of the 'intercultural speaker'. In particular, it draws upon the work of Keesing and Gudykunst in the field of intercultural communication and theoretical foundations in the field of foreign language and culture pedagogy in the work of Kramersch, Zarate and Byram.

Data were collected during a two-year longitudinal study among upper secondary students of French in the north-east of England. They consist of a questionnaire and three semi-structured interviews, together with a number of informal assessment activities. Their teachers were also interviewed. Data were subsequently analysed within the theoretical framework of *savoirs* proposed by Byram (1997b) in *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*.

There was some evidence for the existence of certain of the *savoirs* and a disposition among the participants to develop others. It was clear from the data that experiences outside the classroom had been significant in this respect, but that certain pedagogical practices had probably also been helpful.

The thesis concludes by recommending the inclusion of intercultural competencies in the specifications for foreign languages examinations in the upper secondary sector and offers some suggestions for a three stage development towards the status of intercultural speaker.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Cultural Dimension and Upper Secondary Learners of French

Introduction

The origins of this thesis lie principally within my experience of teaching French in comprehensive schools, and in other institutions over a period of some 25 years. During that time the aims and objectives of modern language teaching, together with the learning population, have changed radically. The concept of culture in the context of everyday speech, as well as language learning, has also undergone a number of transformations. It is to clarify this concept and to understand its significance within the context of a particular group of learners, those who opt to continue their language studies in the upper secondary school in order to study to Advanced Level, that this thesis has been undertaken.

The second half of the twentieth century saw radical changes with regard to the purposes of foreign language learning. In order to understand the concept of intercultural competence as both an aim of the learner and a guiding principle of the teacher, it will first be necessary to examine some of these changes. Changes which have taken place within the foreign language classroom, as well as the social and academic environment of the language learner. In doing so, the thesis will examine some present assumptions about the aims of foreign language learning, the content of the courses studied in the upper secondary sector, and the skills, knowledge and attitudes of the learners.

It is perhaps inevitable that those who are concerned to improve standards or widen participation in foreign language learning will concern themselves with the aspects, which are easy to measure, such as progress in linguistic competence. Those aspects which are more difficult to measure; 'the cultural dimension', 'cultural awareness' and 'intercultural competence' all form part of the discourse on the aims of foreign language education. Indeed, the arguments for their inclusion in a programme of study are now



largely accepted. However, their inclusion in assessment schemes seems to be a very distant prospect. How then can we discover whether upper secondary foreign language learning is achieving other aims than those measured by the public examination system? In the process of studying French, do students automatically become interculturally competent?

This first chapter, then, will provide an historical overview of the link between the concepts of language and culture learning. It will formulate the main research question and outline the approaches which will be adopted in order to discover the extent of the intercultural competencies acquired by a group of Advanced level learners of French in the north-east of England between 1996 and 1998. To begin with there will be a brief overview of the cultural dimension within foreign language learning in the English education system, during the period of my teaching experience.

1.1 Language Learning and the Concept of Culture

1.1.1 Culture and Language Learning in 1975

Those who entered the sixth form 25 years ago, in order to study French, would have been a selected group, having received an education, designed for those considered to be academically able. They were not solely concerned to improve their technical language skills. Part of their motivation, in most cases, was likely to be an interest in France and in the way of life of French people. However, in County Durham, this interest was rarely based on personal contact with France or with French speakers, as very few young people experienced foreign travel. In an area where the traditional life style was dominated by manual labour in mines and factories, the 'otherness' mediated by foreign language and literature study frequently symbolised escape from physical and intellectual restrictions.

Images of contemporary life in France had yet to enter the classroom via the photocopier and the television. It would have been difficult for learners to envisage 'culture' in terms of the everyday life experienced by their French counterparts. Even though 'travel in France', and 'the year abroad' as part of a degree course, were potential outcomes of

their studies, these outcomes were not usually incorporated into the reality of the classroom. As a consequence of this, those who took French as their main Advanced level subject usually did so with the intention of continuing language and literary studies at university. Teaching the literature of the foreign language constituted the cultural component. By reading literature from the accepted canon, students gained access to culture through language.

Within the confines of the classroom, if the concept of culture was ever discussed, it would have been in the context of 'high culture', literary and artistic achievements, produced by and for an intellectual elite. Modern language educators were already aware that this view of culture was somewhat limited. For example, guidance for teachers, in the form of the *Schools Council Working Paper 28 New Patterns of Sixth Form Modern Language Studies* (1970), mentions art, architecture, music, science, technology and history as being manifestations of culture, together with the study of literature. However, the anthropological definition of culture was not included in this report. It was evident that languages at upper secondary level were still assumed to be a minority activity for university bound students. Although the instrumental advantages of foreign language study were also widely accepted, the syllabuses, and therefore the programmes of study were still dictated by traditional university demands

1.1.2 Cultural Changes in Schools and the Concept of Culture

In more recent years there has been a radical reappraisal of the nature and purposes of foreign language learning. The grammar school system had selected those who were thought to be capable of learning a foreign language. Pupils learned largely through the grammar-translation method, with literature studies being undertaken in upper secondary school. However, the advent of comprehensive education, which necessarily implied that all pupils would be entitled to learn a foreign language, brought with it a number of changes. In the first place foreign language learning was regarded as a skill, with practical application in the life of the learner. In the second place its practice, thanks to the use of the tape recorder, was linked to everyday speech of natives. Indeed the

assumption of educators was that communication with native speakers would eventually take place, whether for business or leisure purposes.

Thus, the aims of foreign language learning were linked, on the one hand, to the increase in foreign holiday travel, and on the other to the perceived need to profit from trade within the Common Market. It was evident that some changes in pedagogy would be necessary in order to ensure that all pupils would be able to profit from the experience of learning a foreign language and that they would be able to engage in practical communication. The theoretical and methodological implications of these changes are set out in Littlewood (1981), Widdowson (1984) Brumfit (1984) and Mitchell (1988), among others. In the lower secondary school, the communicative approach was also driven by changes in the examination system, which culminated in the new GCSE examinations, beginning in 1988.

It was clear that new approaches to language learning would require radically different forms of assessment. New approaches to assessment, such as Graded Objectives, described by Page and Hewitt in *Languages Step by Step* (1987), emphasised the requirements of practical communication. In addition, they enabled learners to measure their achievements, rather than to be measured against native speaker norms, which inevitably led to 'degrees of failure' to achieve a perfect standard. This is a point to which we shall return later, as the question of cultural competence can also be a question of measuring a learner against a native speaker

The concept of 'communication' with the acquisition of oral skills being the predominant aim of the learner seemed to offer a practical solution to the problems facing educators during this period. Language courses, which were based upon the communicative needs of the learner and organised in terms of notions and functions, contained little information about the target country. In *Communicative Methodology in Language Teaching* (1984), Brumfit examines the numerous advantages of new approaches, but only briefly mentions content in terms of knowledge about the foreign country (pp109-10). The cultural dimension, as Byram, Esarte Sarries and Taylor

discovered in their survey, *Cultural Studies and Language Learning: a Research Report* (1991) was largely left to teachers. In the case of France, influences outside the school, such as the family and the media tended to offer outdated and stereotyped views, which were difficult to counter.

However, cultural changes which encouraged many more young people to see themselves as foreign language learners, would also imply that they were explorers of the world outside their own country. Textbooks designed for adults assumed that the learner would be a tourist. Cultural information, supplied, for example, in BBC courses, was firmly fixed to concrete notions, visible to the tourist, best defined, perhaps, as the four fs, food, festivals, folklore and facts (Kramsch 1993). These textbooks also had some influence on the design of school course books

No survey of the cultural dimension in British foreign language textbooks, comparable to that carried out by Sercu (2000) in Belgium, is available. However, in order to conform to the 'topic areas' set out in the examination syllabus, material designed for school course books from 1985 onwards stressed transactional needs, but tended to provide a familiar teenage context. Indeed, the syllabus requirements of the GCSE examination specifically defined language to be learned in terms of the needs and interests of 16 year-old learners. Success rates in this examination were much higher than in the previous 'O' Levels, which they replaced. The immediate result of the changes introduced in this period was an increased uptake of foreign language study in the burgeoning upper secondary sector. However, after the initial enthusiasm, there has been a steady decline in numbers of students studying a foreign language post-16, particularly in French. It is hoped that this research project will also offer some insights into this problem

1.1.3 The Upper Secondary Learner and the Concept of Culture

It was also evident that post-compulsory foreign language education would have to meet the requirements of a changing population. In 1981, the publication of '*French 16-19 - New Perspectives*' was a landmark in the rethinking of language teaching at this level.

There was a strong emphasis on the supposed practical needs of the individual language learner. The issues, raised by the study group, were about the objective content and method of advanced foreign language courses. They concerned the intellectual and emotional development of the student, public or individual purposes of language learning, the relative importance of specific objectives or skills and study skills applicable to other fields of endeavour (p3).

Although the authors admitted that language learning implied particular ways of seeing, feeling, and thinking, they did not elaborate on these points in order to define the cultural dimension of language learning. Direct encounter with the foreign 'culture' was held to be 'the full liberating experience'. Preparation for the encounter should no longer be a question of translation and study of literary texts, but 'as realistic and wide ranging as possible' (p4). The implications of such recommendations were addressed in terms of the study of 'authentic' language, and a wider choice of topics to replace or complement literary studies. Examination boards devised many different ways of assessing linguistic skills of Advanced level French students, some of which involved simulations of encounters with 'native speakers'. However, the implications of 'encounter with the foreign culture' have not been directly addressed in assessment criteria.

To judge from course books and syllabuses which followed the publication of this document, and which are still in use, we can see that it represented an influential current of thinking. The combination of instrumental ends with a student-centred approach was a reflection of the educational policies of the period. However, there is an explicit assumption in '*French 16-19*' that the Advanced Level course will prepare the student for work or study in the country concerned:

The advanced language student should be able to move freely and confidently in his (sic) later life in a foreign language environment (p5)

The acceptance of such an assumption would imply that the broader needs of foreign language students should be addressed. However, in this document there are no indications that skills or knowledge other than linguistic might be necessary for such an

experience. Although culture is mentioned, the authors imply that students would be unable to draw meaningful conclusions from a selection of texts, which would only offer partial insights (p9). Indeed, in terms of the literature related to foreign language teaching at the time, there was little guidance available as to the cultural dimension of language learning.

If the old definitions pertaining to high culture were no longer applicable, what was to take their place? It seems that the authors were principally concerned to offer a wider definition of the concept of 'communication'. It could no longer be limited to the satisfaction of basic needs for food and shelter and the exchange of personal information, which tended to be case in the pre-16 classroom. From these limited foundations, students were to move to 'authentic material, related to the contemporary French speaking world, reflecting their needs and interests' (p1) It seemed that the concept of 'culture' was to be avoided rather than redefined in terms of the learner and the education system.

How can an educational discourse, which reflects both an instrumental approach to foreign language education and the concept of student-centred learning also concern itself with the concepts related to 'otherness', implied by serious study of a culture? In the early stages of language learning, some attention was paid to aspects, which impinged closely on the definition of communicative competence. The sociolinguistic dimensions emphasised by Hymes (1972), and elaborated further by van Ek (1986) helped to encourage the use of appropriate language on the part of the learner. Thus learners were encouraged to approach the foreign culture more closely, in terms of the varieties of speech and situation to be met. These aspects were also held to be important at Advanced Level, as candidates were expected to be able to understand

native speakers at natural speed and in a variety of registers
in authentic contexts (NEAB 1996)

The proximity of a range of models in terms of native speakers available through recordings and television transmissions, if not in person, means that the 'other', in terms

of French speakers at least, is not physically distant from the learner. However, the expectation aroused by such proximity can sometimes be equated to that of achieving 'native speaker competence'. This is a linguistic goal which learners often set for themselves, as if by speaking like the 'other', they could become the 'other'. In the following chapter a closer definition of such 'otherness' and intercultural communicative competence will be elaborated, in order to clarify the purpose of the thesis, and to provide appropriate definitions of intercultural competence.

1.2 Intercultural Competencies of Foreign Language Learners

Are students acquiring cultural awareness and intercultural competencies as a result of their learning experiences inside and outside the classroom? In order to discover answers to this question it will be necessary, in the first place to define the competencies concerned. In the second place, to decide how best to obtain relevant and reliable information, about the learning experiences of the students. In the third place, to analyse the information in order to obtain a clearer picture of the present situation.

What changes have taken place in the language learning experiences of upper secondary students of French? If the context of their language learning in the past was, to a large extent, the literary text, what has replaced literature and to what extent does the material they study mediate their relationship with the culture of the country? For the present day learner there is a very wide range of materials available, written, recorded and filmed or obtainable through the Internet. In addition it is increasingly possible, for students of French at least, to visit France and have contact with native speakers. Even in the area of assessment, so long only concerned with definitions of linguistic skills and the appropriate intellectual qualities for university level study, there begin to be direct references to 'cultural knowledge' and to techniques, which might be used to judge achievement

From its relatively limited use in the domains of the arts, anthropology and sociology, 'culture' is now seemingly ubiquitous. The very scope of the concept poses a series of problems for teachers and their students. How can the concept of culture be defined in

such a way as to offer a coherent framework of skills and knowledge (or competencies) for all concerned? What can be deemed appropriate for university entrance level, when it is assumed that Advanced Level studies are also a suitable preparation for work?

There are a number of problems, both conceptual and methodological, which are implied in research on this subject. Firstly, there is a need to search for definitions within the literature relating to culture, such as cultural awareness and intercultural competence and relate these terms to the context of the upper secondary learner. Secondly, there are a number of educational issues to be taken into account. What can be deemed appropriate and feasible at this particular stage? Is it a question, as so often in the past, of defining yet another hurdle for the student? Or is it a question of redefining a number of important concepts relating to language learning itself, its broader social and political implications, and the identity of the learner?

The third problem, which faces the researcher, is that of using a methodology which will enable reliable information to be gathered. In the case of linguistic skills, it is relatively easy to measure comprehension objectively, to obtain samples of oral and written work and judge them against the yardstick of the sympathetic/educated native speaker. In an area where there is no 'body of knowledge' or definition of skills already specified, it becomes difficult to form judgements as to what exactly is being taught and learned. It is difficult to obtain reliable data, as each individual may have very different learning experiences. It will therefore be necessary to use methodological approaches, which can be adapted to a variety of learning situations and overcome some of these problems.

Above all, the focus of the study should be centred on the experience of the individual student. Experience of the foreign culture in its cognitive and affective dimensions will inevitably be linked to the language learning process and must be examined in that context. The approach will therefore be to discover from the learners themselves, as they progress through the two-year period of their Advanced level studies, what intercultural competencies they are acquiring. The underlying assumption of the research will be that these studies are a preparation for an extended period of close

contact with the country or countries where the target language is the normal means of communication. That is to say that the student is preparing to become a sojourner.

1.3 The Advanced Level Syllabus and Culture Learning

Although, at the moment, Advanced Level French examination syllabuses do not refer directly to the concept of sojourner in their declared aims, references to the cultural dimension lead the reader to make such an assumption. For example

Encourage an interest in the contemporary society, institutions, way of life and culture of the foreign country. (AEB 1997)

To develop insights into, and encourage first hand contact with, the culture of countries where the foreign language is spoken. (UCLES 1997)

To develop awareness of various aspects of a society or societies in which the target language is spoken.

To prepare students for use of the target language in work, further study, training or leisure. (EDEXCEL 2000)

If future use of the foreign language is to be situated within the context of a country or countries where it is spoken, then we might assume that other competencies than the linguistic are necessary. The thesis will be based on the premise that Advanced Level study of French is a preparation for first hand contact, either for work or study and that students will require competencies other than the purely linguistic. The approach will be to assume, in the first place, that the aims of the syllabus can be achieved by means of present teaching and learning practices in the upper secondary sector. It can be argued that definitions of intercultural communicative competence, which are offered for example in Byram (1997b), are much more detailed and prescriptive, than those found in the aims of a syllabus. However, since linguistic competencies are defined in detail in examination syllabuses and mark schemes, it is reasonable to consider more detailed definitions of intercultural competencies than those which are offered by concepts such as attitudes, knowledge and skills.

If we agree with Hall (1957), and many other experts that language and culture are inseparable, then some 'cultural' learning must be taking place during the two-year period of study. The approach to be adopted will assume that intercultural competencies are being acquired, to use a variety of approaches to uncover them, and to judge whether they can be said to improve in conjunction with linguistic skills. The data to be gathered and analysed should lead to a process of reflection on the problems, which surround the question, and, it is hoped, contribute to the research field.

1.4 The Structure of the Thesis

The aim of Chapter 2 will be to conduct a survey of the literature to date, which deals with the concept of culture itself and the changes which have taken place in recent years. In particular, it will focus on a number of associated concepts, distinguishing between cross-cultural and intercultural, providing clear definitions of the place of such concepts in second language learning. The scope of this chapter will include literature from North America and from Europe, as well as from Britain. A theory for language and culture learning will be proposed, which will develop the idea of the language learner as intercultural speaker.

Chapter 3 will examine the problems relating to assessment in detail. In particular, it will examine the *Common European Framework of Reference* for the teaching of modern foreign languages and *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence* (Byram 1997b). It will discuss the relevance of these theoretical frameworks to the needs of the research project and to the particular group of learners concerned.

Chapter 4 will discuss theoretical and methodological problems raised by research in this area. Various approaches will be discussed and reasons given for the decisions which were eventually taken. It will include discussion of data collection techniques, in particular a description of the design. This theoretical introduction will be followed by an account of the research project over a period of two years, situating it within a particular context and explaining difficulties.

The design, administration and analysis of the initial questionnaire will be followed by an account of the three separate occasions when semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants. There will also be descriptions of other data-collection instruments, which were used at the same time as the interviews, together with triangulation activities, such as the interviews which were conducted with the teachers

In Chapter 5 the data collected over the two-year period will be analysed within the framework offered by Byram (1997) In the first place some adjustments to the original definitions will be made in order to take into account the developmental stage of the learners. Given that the data were collected over a two-year period, there will also be an attempt to discover whether it is possible to note progression in any area. Stage by stage there will be analysis of the results, with examples taken from transcriptions of the interviews, and comment and analysis relating to the theoretical framework.

In the final Chapter, conclusions will be drawn from the study and related to the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter 2. A development model will be offered with some specific suggestions as to how intercultural competencies might be defined and assessed with the framework of Advanced Level French examinations. Suggestions and recommendations for further development in the field will also be offered

Summary and Conclusion to the Chapter

In this first chapter, there has been a brief introduction to the concept of culture within the context of upper secondary teaching and learning of French. Some of the changes which have taken place over the years in the language learning environment and in the aims of the examination specifications have also been outlined. In addition, there is an overview of the problems posed by the nature of the research, an outline of the methodology which will be employed to obtain data, and the framework for analysis. In the following chapter, the relevant literature will be surveyed in order to clarify concepts and trace the development of theory and practice, relating to cultural knowledge and skills within foreign language teaching.

CHAPTER TWO

A theoretical framework for the study

Introduction

The purpose of this second chapter is to examine the way in which the literature in the field of language and culture learning and intercultural competencies has contributed to the theoretical standpoint behind the research project described in Chapter 1, and its subsequent design and execution. Justifications for the inclusion of a cultural dimension in upper secondary language learning will not be elaborated at this point. Literature on this subject is already extensive and has been influential, to the extent that reference to the cultural dimension appears in all examination syllabuses at Advanced level. There are many scholarly works, which informed this thesis and which are to be found in the bibliography. However, they will not be quoted unless their contribution is relevant to the central questions.

As the project took place over a period of three years, there were periods which were particularly intensive with respect to literature research. Initially, the study took an historical approach, studying the development of the concept of culture in the context of foreign language education and also in the contexts of anthropology, sociology, ethnography and the disciplines related to communication. At the same time, the preparation of a questionnaire, as the first stage of a longitudinal study, entailed research in the field of motivation and in questionnaire design.

Although the longitudinal study was designed on the basis of qualitative research principles, the framework within which the questions were set and afterwards analysed is largely designed on the basis of Byram's theories, relating to intercultural communicative competence (1997b). In addition, particular attention has been paid to the *Common European Framework of Reference* (1998). Although both these publications post-date the period when the research was actually carried out, they were available in draft form at the time of the design. Any comments will, however, refer to the final published versions.

There are many advantages to be gained from conducting a research project in an area in which theory and practice are advancing rapidly. It has been possible to reflect upon theory at the same time as carrying out practical research. Nevertheless, there is a point at which conclusions must be drawn, although it can be tempting to continue in the hope that new theories and insights might be formulated. At the point of writing this chapter, data have been analysed and the earlier literature reviews revised and updated in order to offer an evaluation of the way in which literature in the field has contributed to this study.

The focus will be upon the concept of culture in the context of foreign language teaching in an educational setting. The following chapter will examine issues concerning the teaching and assessment of competencies other than linguistic. The first section of this chapter offers some historical perspectives on culture within the teaching of modern foreign languages in the upper secondary sector. A comparison between past and present understandings of the definition of the term culture is followed by some discussion of the problems faced by foreign language educators who seek to bring about changes in concepts and frames of references (schemata) to enable learners to understand a foreign culture. This section is followed by discussion of the psychological and sociological definition of culture offered by Keesing (1974) and developed by Gudykunst (1998). This definition is used as a basis for discussion of a number of theoretical aspects of the thesis. The work of Kramsch and Zarate, in particular, is used in order to suggest a redefinition of the role of the foreign language speaker. The final section takes a broader perspective, linking the concept of intercultural competence with other educational and social issues.

2.1. Culture and Foreign Language Learning in English Schools

2.1.1 Historical Background

Until the second half of the twentieth century, there was very little debate about the nature and purpose of foreign language education in British schools. Traditionally, members of a cultured, artistic elite were taught mainly in independent or grammar schools, and were offered access to European high culture. Its literary, artistic and philosophical heritage were encountered through the medium of its languages.

Literature and philosophy were taught, like Classical civilisation, using the same methodology as for Latin and Greek. Wider definitions of culture did exist; as early as 1871 Tylor (Stenhouse 1967:1) stated that culture was

that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society.

An educated minority in nineteenth century Britain, as in any society, could have claimed to be 'cultured' in the sense of Matthew Arnold's definition in *Literature and Dogma*, quoted in the *International Education Quotations Encyclopedia* (Noble (ed.) 2001)

Culture, the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world, and thus with the history of the human spirit. (1873)

They had acquired, through education, reading, travel and social contact, a comprehensive understanding of their own society and its place in the world outside, as well as access to a wider range of literature than their own. Some were also able to speak a foreign language. However, for most people foreign languages were essentially a written code, allowing access to written documents. In addition, there were also some members of the educated middle classes who learned languages for various other purposes, including travel and business. The history of this period is documented in Hawkins (1987) and Stern (1983).

Although there were challenges to the teaching approaches described above, notably the Direct Method, which, by use of the foreign language in the classroom, would provide a more direct access to the culture, none were successful in effecting lasting change through examination systems. Hawkins (1987:97-155) gives a brief history of these and describes the way in which upper secondary teaching styles in particular, perpetuated themselves through the universities. The Leathes report of 1918, which proposed Modern Studies for linguists, with a strong anthropological sense of culture, was already critical of the existing situation, stating that

None of the courses give any adequate place to the history of the life, the thought, the institutions of the foreign countries (in Hawkins 1987:285)

It was evident that changes would eventually have to take place in universities and in the training of teachers. Although the proposals did not lead to any immediate changes in foreign language teaching practices in Britain, they were prescient.

Even after the 1944 Education Act, which began to be implemented after the Second World War, languages were largely reserved for those who had obtained entry to grammar schools by competitive examination. These institutions, as far as the teaching of classical and modern languages were concerned, tended to maintain pre-war teaching methodologies and forms of assessment, although with more emphasis on oral work in the initial years of foreign language learning. In the majority of sixth forms, as they were then called, teaching methods and the content of syllabuses for those who were preparing for entry to university remained largely unchanged until the 1970s, concentrating on grammar, translation and works from the literary canon. Even though there were examples of new methodological approaches, there was nothing at this stage which led to changes in the concept of culture within foreign language teaching.

2.1.2 Languages for All and Communicative Competence

An important consequence of the introduction of comprehensive schools in the 1960s was the gradual introduction of foreign language learning for all as an educational policy. In part, the extension of the right to learn a foreign language was a question of equal opportunity. It was also the case that the governments of the time, which were negotiating to join the Common Market in the early 1970s, were concerned that the workplace skills of the population should be appropriate. Questions of education and appropriate skills were, in particular, voiced by the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan in 1976, at Ruskin College, when he initiated the Great Debate on the future of the British Education system. Thus, the idea that foreign language learning should be reserved only for the 'academic' pupils could no longer be sustained.

Developments throughout the 1970s and 1980s entailed a complete change of attitude and approach on the part of teachers and learners. A foreign language was no longer considered to be a minority activity, a vehicle allowing access to a foreign literary culture, but a skill, or series of skills, which could be acquired by anyone. It

is hardly surprising that research effort during this period tended to concentrate on pedagogy, to enable teachers to transmit language skills and learners to acquire them. The audio-lingual and audio-visual approaches succeeded one another, without offering complete solutions to the problems (Hawkins 1987).

Theories and practice current today, were largely built on concepts related to communication and communicative competence, described in full in Brumfit (1984) and Littlewood (1981). These approaches, established and consolidated during the 1980's seemed to fulfil the most obvious purpose of foreign language learning, that of communication for practical purposes. It was, perhaps inevitable that, in their concern to enable people to communicate their essential needs, educators tended to leave aside the question of content and context. Widdowson, for example, writing on course design and discourse process (1984:235), criticises a narrow approach, which considers language learning as the acquisition of a system. To Widdowson the context of a language is associated with the recurrent patterns of social interaction in which it is used, the *schemata*. This term, used here in a linguistic sense, could also be applied to the cultural contexts faced by the language learner, a point to be developed further in Section 2.2.3.

Brumfit addresses the question of relating language to be taught to the content of a course by means of a question.

What should it mean in a particular society to be an English speaking member of that society? We shall come close to defining a possible content for the teaching of English, which is intrinsic to the language being learnt (1984:109)

He goes on to recommend that the subject matter of English teaching in France should directly reflect the historical and ideological relationships between France and English speaking countries (ibid.p110). If, as he suggests, the French learner of English is making a bid to join the community of French speakers of English, we can suppose that he is recommending a similar approach for English learners of French. Some of the implications of this view will be addressed in the sections devoted to *savoirs* in later chapters.

A link between the concept of 'communicative competence', and the content of foreign language courses was offered by van Ek. Working from an analysis of the communicative needs of language learners – especially immigrants into European countries – he and Trim, together with a Council of Europe team, defined a number of notions and functions, which could be used to frame the content of a foreign language course for beginners. The original work was later refined and elaborated, with the definition of further competencies – discourse, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural, which would refine the concept of communicative behaviour (van Ek & Trim 1991:102) However, the first version, which was essentially transactional in its approach, was influential in Britain, because it offered the practical approach which educators were seeking at the time.

This transactional form of language met the immediate needs of immigrant minorities arriving in European countries. It also seemed to fit the context of communication and travel for the populations of Europe, as it became increasingly common for people to take holidays and conduct business in other European countries and to need some basic transactional language for these purposes. Approaches developed initially for adults, by the BBC for example, and used in the mass media were transferred to schools. GCSE syllabuses, developed at that time, prescribed mainly transactional language at the basic levels. It was noticeable that course books for lower secondary schools and adult beginners, published at the time, also tended to present such language.

However, although these syllabuses referred to the importance of the cultural dimension, and the later National Curriculum documents made encouraging mention of

providing opportunities to meet people in different contexts

broadening the range of experience

increasing pupils' awareness of factors which have influenced cultures

developing sensitivity to what is appropriate in language and behaviour

(Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 1997:4)

assessments at all levels concerned only the four linguistic skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. The approaches proposed in the National Curriculum MFL documents did not lead to changes in assessment at GCSE, but only to proposals for activities in the classroom. Given these backgrounds in foreign language study, how would contemporary upper secondary languages students, compared with their predecessors in traditional grammar school sixth forms, view the culture of the target language? An initial comparison between students taught traditionally, and those, whose early language learning experiences involved more experience of 'communicative methodology', might be useful as a starting point

2.1.3 Upper Secondary Languages Students and Culture – Past and Present

The grammar school foreign language student, mentioned above, and in the previous chapter, would have been unlikely to mention the word 'culture', without self-consciousness or embarrassment. Nevertheless, arrival in a sixth form at the time implied induction into a scientific or artistic culture and progression to a university. Writing at this time, Williams noted that, in relation to Anglo-Saxon culture in general, outside elite circles, the word culture met with a certain hostility. He indicated that:

virtually all the hostility (...) has been connected with uses involving claims to superior knowledge, refinement (culchah) and distinctions between 'high' art and popular art and entertainment. It thus records a real social history and a very difficult and confused phase of social and cultural development. (1976:92)

One of the aims of post-war governments was to address problems related to class distinctions and divisions in British society and the 1944 Education Act introduced a new category of student to upper secondary and tertiary education. Although the family backgrounds of their pupils were not usually 'cultured' in the classic sense of the term, the grammar schools modelled themselves on the values and standards of independent schools. Teachers of classical and modern languages attempted to transmit values to these new students, which were associated with their disciplines and with their own education. The conflict and confusion mentioned by Williams, has been the subject of much sociological literature (e.g. Hoggart, 1957) recording a period of cultural change in British society. In the grammar schools, the transmission

of the elite culture continued in the Sixth Form, which prepared students for university courses, mainly involving the study of literature and philosophy.

Despite the conservative traditions in most upper secondary schools, rapid social and cultural changes in the thirty years which followed the 1944 Act tended to erode many differences in British society and Williams could conclude

It is interesting that the steadily extending social and anthropological use of **culture** and **cultural** and such formations as **sub-culture** has (...) either by-passed or effectively diminished the hostility and its associated unease and embarrassment (1976:92)(author's emphases)

Today, some twenty years after the publication of Williams' definitions of culture, young people grow up in a society where the terms 'pop culture', 'ethnic minority culture' and 'drug culture' are common currency. Foreign language students are therefore familiar with his second definition of the term, that is culture in the social sense, as a way of life or the expression of an identity, which is shared by others. Ideas on the subject of collective expressions of identity, in the form of stereotypes, will be discussed with participants during the course of the study. These discussions will, it is hoped, help to clarify the subject a little further.

The following section will develop some of the points made in Chapter 1 on the subject of the upper secondary foreign language student and the concept of culture (1.2). It will examine further some of the advice offered by educators and the impact of such advice upon the design of syllabuses. The central question to be addressed is whether it is possible to teach a foreign culture and to devise a system, which would allow the teaching and learning to be assessed.

2.1.4 Changes to the Syllabus at Advanced Level (16-19)

The 1981 document, already mentioned, (*French 16-19 - New Perspectives*) was not the first to recommend changes in the Advanced Level syllabus. A Schools Council Working Party document of 1970, entitled '*New Patterns in Sixth Form Modern Language Studies*' stated that

The syllabus should at the same time encourage pupils to take

a critical interest in the contemporary culture of the foreign country (1970:28)

At this point, the concept of culture in the social sense, as an expression of shared identity, is not evident to the reader. In fact, the definition has more in common with the French concept of *civilisation*. Students are enjoined to

Gain an insight into the culture (in its widest sense) of the country, its customs, its economic and political life, its history, geography, architecture, art, cookery and fashion, as well as its literature. (ibid:21)

Such insights were to be gained largely through private reading. The authors suggest that they might be tested by essays or extended projects, which might be carried out in the country concerned. However, they make no suggestions as to how the cultural content might be taught in the classroom, or how the non-linguistic elements might be assessed. These fundamental problems still exist today.

Both Halls (1970) and Russell (1970) examined the question of 'culture' in the sense of background knowledge to language study. Halls compared provision in Britain with the situation in other European countries and came to the conclusion that the nature of the material was too encyclopaedic and that there was a danger of forming wrong mental pictures or images of national stereotypes which falsify reality (1970:40). Russell shared some of these concerns but argued that the average post-16 student was not necessarily interested in literary study for its own sake. His advice to teachers and syllabus designers was to appeal to the interests of the student and to deal with contemporary issues.

Reforms to the Advanced Level syllabus at the end of that decade led to some adjustments in the weighting of skills, more emphasis on oral skills and the possibility of studying non-literary topics instead of four set texts. The following decade saw an increase in the number of alternative, non-literary syllabuses offered to schools. These topics were 'cultural' in the sense that they offered historical, geographical, artistic or sociological subjects for study in the context of the target society. In some cases students were free to choose their own approach or subject and undertake coursework. However, the marking of such work concerned the

standard of linguistic competence, together with organisation and presentation of material, rather than the assessment of the cultural insights gained by the candidate. Morgan, in *Teaching Culture at A-level*, surveyed a range of cultural topics offered by various Examination Boards, and concluded that

If a spirit of insider cultural awareness is deemed more valuable, then students will need to understand not only the factual basis of a French context but also the conventions and attitudes which exist when reacting to that context. If such cultural understanding is to be part of a sixth form syllabus, then radical changes to the current A-level format would be both necessary and inevitable. (1993:44)

Personal experience of teaching and marking examinations would confirm Morgan's observations on this subject. Although examination questions tend to be open in order to allow for a breadth of response, there is no guidance to examiners, which concerns the way in which the cultural aspects of the question should be rewarded.

It is evident from an examination of contemporary Advanced Level French syllabuses that the principles suggested by Russell and the authors of '*French 16-19*' still guide designers today. For example the NEAB (AQA) French syllabus for 2000/2001 suggests only four conversation topics for study which specifically concern France, eight which concern aspects of the modern world and four which concern young people today (p4). Although the written topic work is more specifically linked to French source material and the content has been increased to a maximum of 25 marks out of 50, there is no clear guidance for teacher/assessors. Expressions such as 'well thought out and based on intelligent reading', 'evidence well chosen and properly used', (p24), leave a great deal to the subjective opinion of the examiner.

If we turn to the EDEXCEL 2000 syllabus, we see that the Topics and Texts section rewards 'knowledge and understanding of the topic/text'. It also mentions 'grasp of the implications and scope of the questions', 'relevance', 'clarity of thought and expression', 'ability to analyse and substantiate points' and 'insight into the topic/text'. Thus it seems that, while examination boards have moved some way towards prescribing more appropriate content, they are far from defining culture,

cultural awareness, or intercultural competence in terms of assessment tasks. For these changes to take place, definitions and interpretations would have to be made clear to both teachers and examiners.

The problem was addressed in a curriculum development project based at Durham University School of Education, between 1990 and 1992. (Byram & Morgan et al 1994) A programme of study was designed for the first year of upper secondary learners of French. It was subsequently taught and assessed, using definitions of competence based on attitudes, knowledge and skills, as well as the traditional linguistic criteria. One advantage of the project was that it allowed adequate time for training of the teachers concerned. With a basis in theory, they were able to devise suitable materials, teach and carry out assessments. In this they were fortunate, as teacher training programmes at present are concerned almost exclusively with questions relating to linguistic competencies.

However, although the design and execution of the development project, and resulting publications, have encouraged individual teachers to adopt different pedagogical approaches, the evidence from the Advanced Level examination syllabuses seems to point to very little change. In the upper secondary sector, where the emphasis on teaching linguistic skills and obtaining good examination results is very strong, there is little incentive to explore alternative approaches. Nevertheless, there have been changes, relating to the presentation of information about the target culture and the chief of these has concerned the use of authentic material. The following section will touch briefly on the views of teachers and the use of authentic material in the classroom, before discussing the question of the cultural frameworks used by students.

2.2 Teaching Culture

2.2.1 Views of Teachers

How do teachers of foreign languages interpret the questions of teaching culture? A recent study by Byram & Risager (1999) indicates that teachers tend to interpret the message relating to cultural learning in terms of the provision of information about a given society, and the breaking down of prejudice (p100). Teachers will also be

asked for their views on the subject of culture and its place in the foreign language classroom during the course of the research project. It is clear from research already undertaken (Byram & Risager op.cit) that neither teachers nor learners of foreign languages will yet be working from an agreed definition of the term 'culture' for the reasons detailed above and also because the concept itself becomes increasingly difficult to define. Why should this be so?

A glance at the shelves of a library or bookshop marked 'Cultural Studies' will reveal the difficulties faced by those who attempt to engage with the concept. Books to be found there range over topics such as sociology, anthropology, ethnography, politics, ethnic minorities and gender studies and include studies of deviant groups such as criminals. In addition, there will be works covering the media, journalism, entertainment and communication. It is hardly surprising the teachers mentioned above would be disinclined to enter such a minefield.

It is also likely that they are aware of the dangers of the 'folklorisation of the cultural mind', pointed out by Mariet (1991 84-99). There is already a vast quantity of 'cultural information' available to learners. In many cases it is both stereotyped and dated and is propagated by sections of the media and advertising industries in order to confirm prejudices and sell consumer goods. As Mariet says

We could draw up a long list of the misrepresentations we all have of other cultures, preconceptions which are reinforced by approximate journalism or language teaching. Precisely because of their convenience should clichés be systematically rooted out from any intercultural teaching. (ibid:91)

At present, given the fact that 'intercultural pedagogy' does not at present form part of teacher training programmes, it may be that many teachers feel disinclined to engage in teaching about culture for the reasons outlined above. Questions will be asked about their own approaches and their views on stereotypes during data collection.

2.2.2 Using Authentic Material

Nevertheless, the teaching of the French language, especially through the medium of authentic documents will involve transmission of cultural facts, values and attitudes, whether or not these are discussed in class. As has already been noted, the reports

(1970, 1981) which led to changes in the syllabus were concerned mainly with the linguistic skills to be taught and assessed and the presumed interests of the students. The latter report came at a time when authentic material was more readily available to teachers and students. Its use was recommended for a variety of reasons connected with the principles of communicative language teaching. There is a general supposition, promoted by advisors and others who collect and prepare material for teaching purposes, that direct encounter with authentic (written, recorded or filmed) material, destined for native speakers, should be an essential component of any course. It is also assumed that learners would be more motivated by authentic material than by material devised for teaching purposes alone.

Although most teachers and learners would concur with the opinion that authentic material is frequently interesting simply because it has been produced for native speakers, we cannot assume that learners attribute the same meanings as native speakers to the material they encounter. Kramsch points out that the meaning is not 'in' the written or spoken text but in the 'dialogue' between the learner and the text (1993:177). For an effective dialogue to take place the interlocutors (or readers) must have some access to the frames of reference used by the other. It is therefore difficult to concur with Pickering when he introduces a collection of material for use in an upper secondary course of French by assuming that

If the programme is balanced and varied and the source material authentic, it is probable that it will automatically give a good insight into the foreign culture (1992:7).

It seems that the only theory informing the advice given by those who promote the use of such material as a way of teaching about a foreign culture seems to use osmosis as a convenient analogy. Such a theory might be suitable for first culture or language learning, for new information acquired about our own society will tend to fit into patterns of thought and belief, which have been constructed over many years. The process of acquiring, in the cognitive sense, a second culture is complex and cannot be fully discussed in this thesis. However, some brief references to work in this field will clarify the subject and point towards some of the challenges to be faced, when teaching a second culture.

2.2.3 Concepts and Schemata

It is a proposition of this thesis that teachers are, perhaps, ignoring the fact that their students are acquiring representations of the foreign culture, through their own experience, the media and the materials they study in class. If we take the term schema, in the sense of a mental framework, and relate it to cultural information, we can see that learners are likely to fit new information into a pre-existing pattern. We can imagine that, if the process is largely unconscious, the learners will not necessarily be aware that schemata need to be changed. If they have not been trained to seek appropriate information in order to create new schemata, there might only be a sense of confusion and alienation – particularly where the learner is required to participate in the foreign society. The next section will therefore refer to the work of some educators who have considered the question of helping students to adjust their schemata in order to deal with new information, which does not immediately fit their pre-conceived frameworks.

If it were possible to make sense of a target culture by understanding new meanings, rather than dictionary definitions of new words, then the work of foreign language teachers would be considerably simplified. Lantolf (1999), drawing upon the work of Piaget (1959) and of Vygotsky (1980, 1986) on the development of conceptual thought in young children, has reflected upon the way in which individuals appropriate cultural concepts and organise their minds in culturally specific ways (1999:34). He concurs with Vygotsky in his definitions of sense (laid down at a profound psychological level and tending to resist mutation) and lexical (dictionary) meanings. His references to the work of Ushakova (1996), and Steiner (1985) would lead us believe that learning a second language entails extensive reference to the verbal thought processes of the first language. In other words, that it is difficult for a learner to appropriate new cultural meanings in the second language. It is certainly the case that methodologies we refer to as 'traditional', in England made extensive reference to first culture meanings, as learners spent most of their time on sentence and prose translation into the foreign language. However, the work of Ushakova does not really illustrate Lantolf's point, as the second language used in her research was artificial. Can we hope, however, that communicative teaching methods, which make extensive use of the target language and bring visual aids into the classroom,

have perhaps enabled learners to access deeper psychological meanings than was formerly the case?

Lantolf also refers to data collected according to the Associate Group Analysis process (1999:37-41), which tend to confirm the stability of psychological meanings, when subjects are encouraged to produce word associations without taking time to reflect on cultural differences. A more significant study, from the point of view of the classroom language teacher, was carried out by Grabois (1997) and described by Lantolf. In this case there was an analysis of the lexical associations of 16 native speakers of English, 16 of Spanish, 16 English advanced (L2) speakers of Spanish and 16 intermediate (L2) Spanish speakers. Grabois noted that advanced learners, with extensive immersion experience could reorganise their conceptual structures, with regard to abstract words such as 'power', 'love' and 'happiness'. It is not surprising that intermediate learners were unable to do this, given the fact that their language skills would probably be insufficient for any meaningful discussion on abstract subjects in the target language. However, it would have been interesting to discover whether they could deal with more concrete concepts in terms of alternative meanings. An attempt to obtain more information on these subjects will be made during the research project, by asking participants to propose alternative meanings for words, which have the same dictionary definitions in both languages.

Lantolf reports on the use of metaphor and idiom among L2 learners. It appears that the few studies which have been carried out on the subject tend to confirm the fact that L2 learners 'either avoid using them or use them inappropriately when speaking extemporaneously' (1999:45). The correct use of metaphor and idiom is indicative of the fact that the speaker is 'near native in competence'. Does the ability to reproduce these forms of speech indicate intercultural competence? Is it necessary that learners have access to the largely unconscious knowledge of the native speaker, so that they can express themselves in precisely the same way? Personal experience of tutoring Open University students confirms Lantolf's observation that the use of metaphor and idiom is frequently idiosyncratic or inappropriate. However, if we remember that the learner's relationship with the second culture should be a creative and dynamic rather than a question of appropriation (SCA), then we might

take a different view of students' freedom in respect of metaphor and idiom. Kramersch (1993), for example, refers to the way in which students can be encouraged to explore cultural cross references – multiple discourse worlds- and use language for their own purposes.

Students discover the range of their power to assign new values to a seemingly stable and predetermined universe of existing meanings (1993:104)

She thus challenges the assumption that language and culture learning is equivalent to second culture acquisition, and proposes foreign language learning as personal empowerment, a point to be developed below.

Although we might question some of the assumptions made by Lantolf (1999), there is no doubt that foreign language and culture teachers must pay attention to the concepts and schemata already present in learners, as they will either help or hinder the learning process. Howard, in *Concepts and Schemata* (1987) offers a guide to teachers on the subject, which draws on the work of Piaget and Vygotsky, and Rumelhart, (among others). He is chiefly concerned to help science teachers explain new concepts to lower secondary learners. However, many of his definitions and observations would be familiar to language teachers who are aware of the way in which

students often hold existing schemata that greatly resist change and actually interfere with instruction. Material that cannot be understood with their existing schemata is either ignored, compartmentalised, or learned by rote (1987:42).

2.2.4 Changing Schemata

Howard's definitions of schemata and his advice to teachers are largely concrete and pragmatic, because of the fact that he is mainly dealing with scientific propositions. Students' existing schemata can be elicited, they can be confronted with anomalies and then with a new schema for dealing with the anomalies (1987:193-6). A foreign language and culture, like a scientific proposition, is likely to conflict with the cognitive structures and schemata established early in the socialisation process. In addition, because the link between language and culture is so strong, we might

suppose that it is difficult to effect changes. As Geertz (1973) quoted by both Lantolf (1999) and Byram (1989a), states, culture is

Historically transmitted semiotic network constructed by humans and which allows them to develop, communicate and perpetuate their knowledge, beliefs and attitudes about the world. (1973:89).

We can see that it might be easier to change some schemata, than others. For example those which were laid down in early socialisation are most likely to be associated with strong emotions and values, beliefs and attitudes, and therefore especially resistant to change, a fact which is also pointed out by Berger and Luckmann (1966:77). In addition, a language teacher is not sharing a first language with her pupils in the same way as a science teacher. Neither is the problem one of simply presenting information, for this could well be assimilated in such a way as to reinforce ethnocentric ideas. Byram points out that learners need to become aware of their own culture as foreign, for

Where 'background information is offered in the same way as, say, English history, the pupil is not required to tune or restructure existing schemata. (1989:114)

So, although Howard's definitions are helpful in that the cognitive processes are clearly set out, we must return to Byram's chapter devoted to the psychological dimensions of cultural studies learning (1989:102-119) to enter the world of the language learner. Like Howard he draws on the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Rumelhart (1980) to discuss concept formation and the possibility of change through the accretion, tuning and restructuring of schemata. He also cites the work of Farr and Moscovici, (1984) who suggest two fundamental processes by which we cope with new experience:

'Anchoring' which draws something foreign and disturbing that intrigues us into our particular system of categories and compares it to a category which we think to be suitable (1984:29); and 'objectifying', which saturates the idea of unfamiliarity with reality (1984:38 in Byram 1989:110)

Byram completes the picture with concrete examples of the French words, *rouge* and *brun*, and the example of *tu/vous*, taken from the early years of teaching French. He

suggests that pupils could be encouraged to assimilate new experience to old schemata or to develop new schemata. It seems, therefore, that there are a number of approaches, which might be used in this respect. However, there has been little research work on the effectiveness of one method or another in the case of younger learners.

The problem with upper secondary learners is slightly different, in that they are a self-selected group, whose early years of foreign language learning have been relatively successful. Reasons for success are often difficult to ascertain and one could only speculate as to whether students who continued with language study had been able to adjust their mental frameworks better than their peers. An attempt will be made, at the beginning of the research project, to ascertain whether those who opt to continue their studies were attracted to the idea of integrating themselves into another culture. It is evident that some adjustment must take place, in order for the new learning to be accepted.

There is nevertheless a considerable difference between success in the early years of foreign language learning, when new concepts (such as that for cheese/fromage, discussed in Zarate 1986) can be presented in an attractive manner - and the demands of an upper secondary course. Pleasant associations with holiday experiences can be helpful, but do not challenge the learner or provide the foundation for the skills, knowledge or attitudes necessary for full intercultural experience, in the shape of a period of work or study. The fact that French at upper secondary level is considered to be difficult and that ever fewer students opt to specialise at a later date, suggests that complacency here is inappropriate. It could be that lack of attention to the students' mental processes, as they encounter new cultural frameworks, hinders their ability to engage with the material they encounter. The work of Lantolf (1999) here is helpful in that it distinguishes between the dictionary definition of a word and a much deeper and more complex meaning, firmly embedded in the mental framework.

Rather than confronting pupils directly with anomalies in their original schemata, as Howard recommends in the case of science teaching, Byram (1989:117) proposes that pupils should be presented with new experience of their own ethnicity. In this

he means a foreigner's view of their ethnicity, with the intention that their existing schemata of their own ethnicity shall change when they cannot cope with the new experience. We do not know whether or not this approach would be suitable in the lower secondary school. However, it was used in the curriculum development project (Byram and Morgan et al 1994). The result was that some, if not all students involved in the project, seemed to develop a better awareness of their own culture and more openness to differences in the target culture, than might otherwise have been the case. (This, as far as was reported by the participating teachers)

These conscious and unconscious representations will be examined during the process of data collection, and theories related to the formation of such representations will be examined in the course of this chapter. However, before considering the question further it is interesting to note that a student interviewed in preparation for the project, who had spent the summer working in France, emphasised the importance of the French 'mind set' (his words). His experience of everyday life and work was unusual for someone of his age, but we will see that the term he used corresponds to some definitions of culture used in the literature, as well as the concept of mental frameworks or schemata. It seems that his experience of France had taught him that it was necessary to adjust his schemata to deal with otherness.

2.3 Ethnocentricity - Adjustment Through Information

An inability to adjust schemata to deal with another culture could also be compared to 'ethnocentricity', a state of mind which has been studied extensively by social psychologists and writers on intercultural communication (see Gudykunst below). As it is widely supposed to inhibit language and culture learning, its foundations need to be studied by educators. At present, an appropriate level of linguistic skill is assumed to be sufficient for overseas experience of work or study (Advanced Level or above) However, for some direct encounter with the foreign culture does not prove to be successful. For example, Coleman, after undertaking an extensive study of British students during their period of residence abroad (1996, 97, 98) found that about 30% showed some evidence of increased ethnocentricity and negative attitudes towards the natives of their host country. We can assume that these students had had

extensive contact with authentic material in the classroom before their period abroad. However, in most cases, they would not have had any training in adjusting 'self' to 'other' while dealing with the information they received. An example of such training, together with that of the use of ethnography can be found in work of Roberts, et.al.(2001).

Coleman's study inevitably leaves many gaps in our understanding of these young people's intercultural experience. It is difficult to compare them with the upper secondary student, who may only have little personal experience of a foreign culture. However, as travel and the possibility of working or studying in Europe is a distinct reality for many, learning culture, in the social and psychological sense of the word, can be assumed to involve some participation in the way of life, including the expression of identity. There is some anecdotal evidence that experiential learning alone produces intercultural competence in some instances, in the same way that some people manage to 'pick up' a new language and speak it almost perfectly. However, we might also suppose that careful and effective teaching would enable learners to begin to be able to make adjustments in their schemata, if they could see the reasons for doing so.

Initially these reasons could be linked to their goals of travelling in a foreign country, an experience already begun by most young people who undertake Advanced Level French. Evidence will be sought to confirm this during the research project. Marshall, having questioned Advanced Level foreign language teachers on the subject of participation and learner motivation in modern languages after GCSE (2000:57) found that the desire to travel was considered to be the second most important reason for the option to continue a foreign language after the age of 16. Although this desire might not, in the first instance, be linked to skills, knowledge and attitudes needed by the overseas sojourner, it can offer a starting point.

It is already the case that lower secondary learners are provided with some information about the target culture. There is no reliable way of discovering exactly what this information is, due to the fact that the present assessments at 16+ do not include such knowledge. However, attempts will be made to discover more about this aspect, in the case of the participants in the research project. Nevertheless, the

provision of information, however interesting, is likely to confuse rather than satisfy the second language learner, if it is studied without explanation as to its significance. Without guidance, it seems likely that learners will try to assimilate new information to a familiar context or treat it as exotic and incomprehensible because it is foreign. Murphy-Lejeune, Cain and Kramsch point out that in order to learn a foreign language we must first learn how to construct new representations of other cultures and revise our representations of our own culture because

individuals are supplied with a set of values which compel them to regard every other linguistic or cultural system as a version, sometimes a degraded version, of their own native system. (1996:52)

Gudykunst also points out that such ethnocentrism is normal, the inevitable result of our socialisation

A bias towards the in-group that causes us to evaluate different patterns of behaviour negatively, rather than try to understand them (1998:106)

Berger and Luckmann, largely drawing on examples from anthropology or the ancient world, go even further:

The alternative universe presented by the other society must be met with the best possible reasons for the superiority of one's own. (1966:126).

2.3.1 Ethnocentricity - Adjustment to Self-Identity

If it is the case that the acquisition of knowledge/information about the target culture is insufficient in itself to lead to deeper understanding and the development of competencies to deal with situations which may arise for the sojourner, what else is needed? What changes should take place in the learner? The weaknesses of an approach, which considers only the cognitive domain have been examined above. Some educators, however, have taken a different approach to the question. Byram has frequently stressed the need for affective change on the part of the learner, and Coleman's study has demonstrated that knowledge and practical experience do not guarantee an increase in intercultural competence. Meyer, (1991) building on earlier work by Kordes (1986) and in the context of the upper secondary learner, presents a definition which is almost entirely built on self-concept,

The ability of a person to behave adequately and in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures. Intercultural competence includes the capacity of stabilising one's self identity in the process of cross-cultural mediation and of helping other people to stabilise their self identity. (1991:137)

It seems that his upper secondary students were set tasks, which gave them the opportunity to demonstrate one of three skill levels – monocultural, intercultural and transcultural. Their progress throughout a two-year period was also traced, in order to discover whether they would move from one level to another. He concludes that intercultural competence is not a 'natural' or 'automatic' result of foreign language teaching (ibid:157). In comparison with the focus of this thesis, Meyer's definition is precise and specific. However, the question of mediation is considered to be an extremely important aspect of intercultural competence and his study has helped to formulate the methodology of this research project. In both cases, however, researchers are in the situation of trying to judge competencies, which have not been specifically taught.

In all learning situations achievement is more easily realised if students, their teachers (and ultimately their assessors) are clearly aware of the nature of changes to be effected and the way in which progress might be accomplished and recorded (Gipps 1994:16). It is evident, in the first place, that the acquisition of information about the target culture needs to be placed in a context which does not alienate the student and allows pre-existing schemata to be revised. In addition, mediation is a delicate and complex skill, which needs to be taught as such. To rely on the self-identity and linguistic skills of the learner, rather than to define and teach to specific criteria, is unlikely to produce positive results, in the sense that steps towards achievement cannot easily be delineated. The process should be clear to both teachers and learners, and they should be able to agree on the criteria for success.

It seems, therefore, that although teachers may have varied and authentic resources at their disposal, this will not automatically ensure that students understand the new meanings they encounter, let alone understand and appreciate cultural differences, or move towards intercultural competence. The next step will be to consider some

theoretical approaches which take into account the fact that learners, who are already situated within a cultural context, their own, can be helped to transform their perspectives. In the next section, therefore, the concept of culture will be examined from a slightly different perspective, which will lead to a definition of the intercultural speaker.

2.4 A Theory for Culture and Language Learning

This section will use a definition of culture offered by Keesing (1974) and quoted by Gudykunst in *Bridging Differences* (1998:41), following earlier works on the subject of intercultural communication. Although the definition does not specifically refer to the problems facing language and culture learners in educational environments, it will offer a starting point for a discussion concerning the language learner. It is principally useful in that it emphasises the fact that culture is mental context (a mind set) within which we lead our lives:

Culture, conceived as a system of competence shared in its broad design and deeper principles, and varying between individuals in its specificities, is then not all of what an individual knows and thinks and feels about his/her world. It is his/her theory of what his/her fellows know, believe and mean, his/her theory of the code being followed, the game being played, in the society into which he/she was born.....But note that the native actor's (or actress's) 'theory' of his/her culture, like his/her theory of language may in large measure be unconscious. (Keesing 1974:89 in Gudykunst 1998:41)

2.4.1 Gudykunst's Interpretation of Keesing's Definition

Although Gudykunst himself does not specifically address a language learning public, the above definition, which he develops within the sphere of inter-group communication, is useful, for a number of reasons. Firstly it implies that learners should become consciously aware of elements in their own lives and in their own society, which they had previously taken for granted. That is to say, they have to become aware of their own schemata, before they can adjust them to integrate new information. Here Gudykunst aims to help his readers in this process. In the chapters which follow the quotations on the subject of understanding cultural differences and group differences, he uses dimensions such as individualism-collectivism and low- and high-context communication and power distance, which

were proposed by others (Hall 1959, Hofstede 1980, Triandis 1980) and refines them in terms of dimensions of cultural variability. Then, following Keesing's conclusion that

Culture in this view is ordered, not simply as a collection of symbols fitted together by the analyst, but as a system of knowledge, shaped and constrained by the way the human brain acquires, organises, and processes information and creates 'internal models of reality' (ibid).

Gudykunst attempts to make the readers more aware of their own cultural views, by means of self-assessment questionnaires. These are to be a 'tool', which will help them to define the degree of their own ethnocentricity (1998:106). This might be seen, together with similar sections in each chapter of the book, as a practical approach, helping the reader towards self-knowledge, and therefore reflexivity. However, the weakness of such instruments is their dependence on scrupulous honesty and prior self-awareness on the part of the learner. The correct answers are obvious, and the very fact that the reader has chosen to study the question of *Bridging Differences* would imply a lack of ethnocentrism in the first place. This approach leaves on one side the importance of learning a foreign language, but does address the question of self-awareness. (ibid:65-69).

2.4.2 Knowledge and Awareness - Gouldner

It is at this point, perhaps, that the concept of knowledge should be re-examined for the purposes of the language learner. It is clear, from the research quoted in the previous section, that complete understanding in terms of objective knowledge about another culture is an unrealistic and therefore inappropriate goal for the foreign language learner. In any situation involving misunderstanding and cultural difference, both parties will probably lack some objective knowledge about the other, and according to the works cited above are likely to evaluate the other negatively. What other kinds of knowledge might be available?

Here we can draw a parallel between language learning and sociology, in particular reflexive sociology. Just as cultural relativism entails a deepening awareness of own culture while studying another, so Gouldner, in an article published in 1970,

Towards a Reflexive Sociology, and reprinted in *Social Theory* (Lemert, 1993:469) points out that awareness of self is seen as an indispensable avenue to awareness of the social world. This distinction enables language learners to define the intercultural nature of their endeavour more clearly

Knowledge as information, then, is the attribute of a culture rather than of a person; its meaning, pursuit and consequence are all depersonalised. Knowledge as awareness, however, is quite another matter, for it has no existence apart from the persons who pursue and express it (1970- cited in 1993:469)

If we apply this definition, then, to the exploration of another language and culture, the learner, like the reflexive sociologist, becomes transformed. Cultural awareness is not simply the sum total of seemingly objective knowledge about the society in question (as we might assume from the work of Lantolf), but implies a transformation of the learner in an exploration of the self and the other. The language learner as a communicator must seek from others the meanings and values, which are embodied in the culture. Dialogue must be established and this dialogue will have the potential to shape and change the individual – a point which Kramsch stresses in an exposition of her concept of ‘Thirdness’ and intercultural competence (1999:45-6), drawing upon the work of Bakhtin (1981). This point will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter. Before leaving the question of intercultural dialogue, there will be some discussion on the subject of foreign language use. To what extent is the learning of the foreign language essential to the establishment of such dialogue?

2.4.3 Intercultural Communication – Foreign Language Learning

Although Gudykunst acknowledges the importance of language in communication generally (1998:193-8), he accords minimum attention to the question of foreign language learning and its place in the acquisition of intercultural competencies. We are led to conclude that the methods he proposes are likely to be unsuccessful outside the context of the United States. It is a society, which is multicultural in that its citizens come from very diverse backgrounds, as Schwarz has pointed out in *The Diversity Myth: America’s Leading Export* (1994). However, power and influence, including academic credibility, are largely in the hands of the anglophone majority.

Thus, concepts concerning intercultural communication, which in Europe (and elsewhere) are likely to involve more than one language, remain within a monolingual setting in the United States. Thus, Gudykunst's work contains a fundamental weakness, seen from the point of view of the foreign language teacher who is concerned to promote intercultural competencies.

If we are concerned to define intercultural communicative competence more clearly and suggest standards of achievement, then there is a point at which communication cannot be 'intercultural' because it is not between two cultures, as expressed in their different languages, but between two speakers, using one dominant language. Given the importance of language in the formation of concepts and schemata (as discussed above) Hall's truism 'language is culture and culture is language' (1959) cannot be ignored. When Byram, addressing foreign language teachers, states that

Language pre-eminently embodies the values and meanings of a culture, refers to cultural artefacts and signals people's cultural identity (1989:41)

his words could equally well be addressed to intercultural communicators, who avoid the implications of the term 'intercultural'. Although some understanding of a foreign culture can be achieved without language skills, we must assume, nevertheless, that certain high level competencies are unlikely to be found unless language skills also exist. Thus cultural relativism, and consequently intercultural competence, is more complex than understanding strangers' behaviour. As has already been shown above, part of the problem relates to the understanding of the 'meaning' of words and the unconscious nature of our cultural frameworks (schemata). In the next section this aspect of Keesing's definition will be explored further.

2.4.4 The Unconscious Nature of Cultural Knowledge - Implications for Learners

In the first place, Keesing's theory emphasises the incomplete and *unconscious* nature of much cultural knowledge. It also acknowledges the fact that culture is a largely individual theory relating to a collective situation, rather than a vast quantity of disparate knowledge, which is known to native speakers and hidden from learners. This is an important distinction for learners, who, as they learn a foreign language

and culture, can become more aware of their own society and the way in which their own language expresses aspects of their culture.

The mental processes involved in learning a foreign language ought to imply a certain distancing from the students' own language, and by implication, culture. Another form must be sought in which to express oneself, and this is likely to involve 'incursions' into another culture. This might happen incidentally, or in a structured programme of learning (as set out in Byram & Morgan *et al.* 1994). Attempts will be made to discover from the data collected during this research whether foreign language learning in itself enables students to distance themselves from their own culture. If so, they should become more aware of its specificity and be able to view certain aspects more objectively than non-linguists.

In the second place, the language learner who envisages the possibility of becoming a sojourner in another country is, by implication, in a communicative situation. Most communication will take place with native speakers for whom s/he will be a representative of the home culture. Whether consciously or not, there will be attempts to process new information, in order to compare experiences in the home and foreign environment. The unconscious approach would be to assimilate new information to fit existing schemata - that is to say cultural references from the home background which probably include some preconceptions about the target culture (Rumelhart 1980, Farr and Moscovici 1984, Pickering 2001). It would seem, therefore, that language studies at this level should be designed to take account of this situation and, at least, make students aware of their own existing frameworks and offer some alternatives.

In the third place, the task of the learner in a communicative situation is to engage in dialogue with an 'other', an interlocutor, or through engagement with text or media/materials involving less direct access to the culture. Foreign interlocutors are faced with a similar task, that of gaining access to schemata 'other' than their own. Even though there might be an unequal power balance, as a consequence of one person using their first language and the other using a foreign language, the task involves communication and is essentially 'intercultural', that is to say between cultures. In both cases, to a greater or lesser extent, the unconscious becomes more

conscious when there is fruitful dialogue, a point already made above in the context of 'Thirdness' (Kramsch 1999). If the learner is aware of the processes and has practised techniques, such as ethnographic enquiry, then s/he should be in a better position to fulfil the role of sojourner, by using encounters as a method of gaining cultural awareness. (Byram and Morgan 1994:104-116). In addition, although the gain to the interlocutor may not be measurable, it should not be forgotten that intercultural encounters are potentially enriching for all concerned.

Another point to be made concerns the pre-existing relationship between the cultures brought to an encounter. In many instances, and almost certainly in a European context, there already exists some structural relationship between cultures, albeit in the form of stereotypes which are unconscious in the sense that they do not result from personal observation and experience, but from long historical associations. Risager notes that

The intercultural approach also deals with the learner's own country, and with relations between the target countries and the pupil's own, and possibly with other countries – including relations of dominance and intercultural attitudes (1998:244)

It is likely that, with appropriate tuition, the learner will be able to examine unconscious hetero-stereotypes in an objective way, comparing them with auto-stereotypes. This intercultural skill can be used to mediate between cultures and, when necessary, help to defuse difficult, or potentially conflictual situations, a point which will be discussed further in the concluding chapter. The next section will examine further implications in the definition of the language learner as intercultural speaker. Drawing upon the work of Kramsch and Zarate in particular, a theoretical definition will be proposed.

2.5 The Language Learner as Intercultural Speaker

By force of circumstance, the sojourner is an intermediary between cultures. S/he is either successful in the sense that s/he is capable of integrating new experiences and information into appropriate schemata, of relativising and, when necessary mediating, or unsuccessful in the sense that s/he fails to engage with the experience and thereby develop intercultural competencies. The criteria, therefore, by which we may judge the learner, are not those used for the successful imitator of native

speakers, possessor of an enormous 'cultural baggage', (as we might suppose, if we consider the problem solely as a question of acquiring a second culture). Rather it is the successful organiser and interpreter of intercultural experiences, who through dialogue with the 'other' and discovery of the 'self', becomes a critical, but fully engaged individual. In recent years the former criteria have been used in examinations and assessments, perhaps offering unrealistic targets of attainment. This change of concept, and, by implication, self-concept, has the potential to engage language learners in a more meaningful approach, than the imitation of the native speaker. The work of Kramsch, Zarate and Byram will be discussed, with reference to foreign language teaching in particular and the discussion will also make reference to wider political and education concerns in the final part of the chapter.

Although foreign language teachers in an English context, particularly in a north east of England context, deal in the main with monolingual native speakers of English, they and their pupils are nevertheless aware that classrooms are becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural. Many pupils will have at least crossed borders for the purposes of tourism. At upper secondary level we can assume that concepts such as travel, work and study in another country are seriously envisaged by foreign language learners, (Marshall 2000:57). Kramsch notes that:

In our days of frequent border crossings, and of multilingual, multicultural foreign language classrooms, it is appropriate to rethink the monolingual native speaker norm as the target of foreign language education. As we visit the marked and unmarked forms of language usership, I propose that we make the intercultural speaker the unmarked form, the infinite of language use, and the monolingual monocultural speaker a slowly disappearing species, or a nationalistic myth. (1998:30)

Kramsch here draws upon the concept of the intercultural speaker as an appropriate definition for those who engage themselves with 'otherness', initially perhaps in the classroom, but eventually by meeting and mixing with strangers. The intercultural speaker crosses borders and, inevitably, moves mentally or physically to a position, which is removed from the one into which s/he was initially socialised.

For further clarification on the subject of the intercultural competencies of the foreign language learner as stranger, we turn to the work of Zarate (1986) She

examines the question in depth in her analysis of the cultural competencies of both the native speaker and foreign language learner. As in Keesing's definition, she stresses the unconscious nature of cultural knowledge, for

La connaissance acquise au sein de la communauté maternelle, l'expérience implicite du monde font que les schémas de pensée sont inexplicables du fait même qu'ils n'ont jamais été présentés comme objets nécessitant une explication (1986:27)

The practical knowledge of their own culture allows native speakers to respond to situations appropriately, while foreigners might hesitate or need to ask for information. However, since the knowledge which native speakers use, is largely unconscious, they do not have the necessary training to explain their vision of the world in a systematic and objective fashion. Therefore the outsider who has already learned the foreign language is in a position to use it in order to build schemata which may be better defined than those built on experience and instinct. Zarate continues that, although

on ne peut parler que d'une culture que l'on a approchée.....
un excès de proximité nuit également à la saisie objective d'une
réalité culturelle (ibid:28)

She acknowledges that the foreign visitor, with an inadequate system of references is likely to misjudge situations. Nevertheless, the foreigner situated on the borderline between cultures already possesses more than one perspective and is able to compare, a fact which is likely to offer advantages, for

L'étranger, en étant celui qui ne participe pas dans la connivence générale, devient un observateur particulier. Il est dans cette position limite qui lui fait appréhender le réel dans les conditions rendant possible une objectivité maximale (ibid:32)

These observations have direct implications for the foreign language classroom, where pupils could, through the discovery of their own and the foreign culture, uncover the mechanisms, which allow people to belong to a culture.

Byram, too, develops the point further in the context of a more comprehensive discussion of questions relating to empathy and attitude as well as knowledge:

Confrontations with their own culture seen from the perspective of others is an important means of bringing unconscious and 'naturalised'

beliefs into consciousness, so that their relativity and specificity can be acknowledged (1994:44)

The requirement for learners to develop skills of observation and objectivity in respect of their own and the target culture has important implications for their ability to develop critical cultural awareness, a point which is further examined in the context of Byram's model for the educational dimension of intercultural communicative competence (1997b:34). It also implies a transformation of the role of the language and culture learner, who is no longer simply dependant on a particular source of received wisdom, the native speaker, or indeed the 'facts' presented in an authentic document.

A conscious effort to understand underlying schemata, together with a more critical and analytic view than has hitherto been required from the upper secondary language learner, would also imply change in self-concept for language learners, who tend to regard themselves simply as 'less than adequate versions of the native speaker'. It therefore has the potential to raise their self-esteem and professional identity, as well as to offer a critical and analytic dimension to their studies.

One result of the communicative competence movement in the context of general education has been to consider foreign language competence to be a useful additional skill in a number of contexts, but only a minority interest on its own. Another has been to privilege the position of the native speaker to the point where the learner is always in a relatively inadequate and powerless position. Although some learners accept this position with equanimity, for others it becomes a barrier to their learning. As educators we should perhaps be more concerned to ensure that foreign language learning is an empowering experience, rather than one which offers a form of second-class citizenship in the target language country.

It is possible that intercultural learning, offering a unique access to the home culture and language as well as to the target culture, would provide both a challenge to learners and an attainable goal. In the present climate, in Britain at least, where there is a steady decline in those who continue into the upper secondary sector with one or two foreign languages, it seems urgent to reflect upon the nature and purpose of language learning. A clearly defined concept of the intercultural speaker would

necessarily involve political, professional and social identities and roles in the modern world. More importantly, it would involve the ability to interpret and relativise and, finally, to mediate between different cultural viewpoints. These aspects will be defined more closely in the following section.

2.5.1 The Intercultural Speaker as Interpreter

The position of the intercultural speaker is on the border, or faultline (Kramsch 1993:205-232) between two or possibly more cultures, in the unique position of cultural and language interpreter. The term 'interpret' seems to have fallen into disuse in the context of communicative approaches to language learning. This may be due to its association with the mechanistic skills, which can at low levels be replaced by a computer. In Zarate's view however the practice of a foreign culture is not a mechanistic, almost passive translation of one language into another, but an initiation into new competencies, the possession of a new space where it is possible to acquire the ability to relativise:

*un jeu incessant entre le dedans et le dehors, l'intérieur
et l'extérieur d'une communauté. C'est dans cet espace
interstitiel que se situe l'apprentissage de la relativité (1986:37)*

The ability to relativise might be defined in this context as: to understand better cultural differences which separate people, and to use this understanding in order to reconcile differences, or to mediate. It involves both a heightened awareness and a non-judgemental attitude, which seeks to understand different languages and cultures within their contexts. In practical terms then, the intercultural speaker will often be called upon to interpret and hence to mediate, another complex skill, which requires self-knowledge as much as knowledge of otherness. As a result of frequent dialogue with 'the other', as an interlocutor, or through a mediated system, learners should gain the mental flexibility implied by Zarate, which will enable them to become critical, culturally aware citizens. This definition is, perhaps, not far from Meyer's (1991) concept of transcultural. However, the intercultural speaker will not necessarily abandon the implications of belonging to a particular culture (as Meyer seems to imply in his definition). Instead, one might look for self-awareness, the ability to compare objectively and solve problems when it is possible to do so.

It is at this point that the concept of knowledge should be re-examined for the purposes of the language learner. It is clear that objective knowledge about a particular society is never likely, in itself, to be sufficient for the purposes of mediation. It is also likely that, in a conflictual situation, both parties will lack knowledge, in the sense of information, about the other. Thus the mediator requires a different kind of knowledge, that which is suggested by Gouldner, (Section 2.4.2). and which is essentially reflexive. It is this kind of knowledge, which can lead to the ability to relativise, as defined by Zarate (1986).

As was pointed out in the discussion on Gouldner, learners engage in dialogue in order to seek cultural meanings and values from others. In doing so, they will also become aware of their own meanings and values. Techniques might include participant observation and ethnographic enquiry as well as the traditional text-based approach. This search is essentially a joint/intercultural pursuit, which involves more than one person, as well as a guide/teacher. It should bring about increased awareness on both/all sides. Although it must be complemented by some objective knowledge, this is not the knowledge which will transform the learner. The learner will be transformed by the intercultural experience of seeking and obtaining knowledge through people, ethnographic enquiry as described by Roberts et al (2001:op cit.). Thus, natural ethnocentricity, perhaps a necessary pre-condition for tribal living in the past, is gradually replaced by attitudes, which are necessary for survival and spiritual and intellectual growth in the modern world

2.5.2 The Transferability of Intercultural Competencies

In addition, there is the question of transferability of competencies. Here again, we might compare the intercultural speaker with a non-linguist, who has acquired some background, cultural information about the country to be visited. Intercultural skills of observation and enquiry, which are necessary for the understanding of one culture, can be transferred to another, provided that they accompany fresh linguistic skills. An ability to relativise would imply that the learner of a third/fourth language and culture already possessed certain skills of adjustment, connected with the processing of new information, overcoming the phenomenon of culture shock and

establishing relationships in the new culture. It seems likely, therefore, that without rejecting the home culture, the intercultural speaker will possess the ability to relativise cultures and to maintain a stable personal position in different environments. Should we go so far as to define this position as the 'third place'?. The definition 'espace interstitiel' (Zarate 1986) or the 'cultural faultline' (Kramersch 1993) has already been used. To conclude this chapter a brief overview will be given of the concept of 'thirdness' or 'the third place', as conceived by some of the educators whose work has been considered in this chapter.

2.6 The Intercultural Speaker and the Third Place

According to Zarate the 'espace interstitiel' is a space occupied by individuals who have shifted their position to where they see their own culture through a different mirror simply because they have moved from their 'normal' position within their home culture, in order to explore 'otherness'. We might suppose that such a shift would happen naturally, but that preparation in the classroom would make it richer and more productive. The process by which this might happen is explained in detail in Zarate (1986:23-42)

Similarly, Kramersch refers to the teaching of language and culture 'along the cultural faultline' (1993:205) and suggests that four lines of thought should be taken into consideration

- 1 Establishing a sphere of interculturality, reflecting on the target and the native culture
- 2 Teaching culture as an interpersonal process, that of understanding otherness
- 3 Teaching culture as difference, not just national traits, but many other factors
- 4 Crossing disciplinary boundaries, to include anthropology, sociology, semiology

In addition, as Kramersch explains (ibid: 233-259) the boundary experience of language learners makes them conscious of the paramount importance of context and enables them to manipulate contextual frames and perspectives in order to gain

power and control as they try to make themselves at home in a culture of the third kind (ibid:235).

Kramersch further develops both the students' need for power and control over the language they are learning and the question of critical cultural awareness, proposing three frameworks for this third place, sociological, educational and political. Learners have to construct their personal meanings at the boundaries between the native speakers' meanings and their own everyday life. The personal pleasures they can derive from producing these meanings come from their power to produce them (ibid 238-9) This struggle is, according to Kramersch - the educational process per se. The educational value of cross-cultural approaches is to focus on 'paradox and conflict and often irreducible ways of viewing the world'. Just as she quotes Bahktin when emphasising the need to dialogue with a text (an idea) in the foreign language, so does she identify with him in the sense that the intercultural speaker, like the writer 'consciously stands outside language in order to express particular meanings' (1993:171)

We might interpret this in terms of the insights obtained by language learners time and again as they come to realise that meanings of words are transformed by their context. The logical consequence of this realisation is an inability to continue taking for granted the framework of meanings into which they are socialised. Kramersch points out that this could also be described as a first step towards critical awareness, political engagement and the transformation of societies as 'teachers and learners view themselves as operating within and across multiple discourse worlds' (ibid:240).

Liddicoat, Crozet and Lo Bianco, in a collection of articles entitled *Striving for the Third Place* (1999) also attempt to distinguish a particular place for the intercultural speaker. Like Kramersch, they refer to the work of Bahktin (1981). In the conclusion to the book they explain that

The nature of the third place is negotiated by each user as an intersection of the cultural perspectives of self and other. The third place is a dialogic encounter between the self and knowledge and between the self and other. (1999:181-187)

This definition is somewhat abstract for the purposes of upper secondary language learners and their teachers. However, it does fit into the arguments put forward in the course of this chapter concerning the nature of knowledge, and the importance of self-awareness, as a stage in the process of understanding the other.

Kramersch develops her earlier views on the subject in a 1999 article entitled *Thirdness; The Intercultural Stance*. Her earlier (1993) discussion on the subject of the Third Space mentions the sociological, educational and political implications involved in the definition of the intercultural speaker (1993:239-257) Here, the association is not discussed in detail, but linked to the views of Giroux and Freire. The reader is encouraged to pursue the implicit connections between foreign language and culture learning and critical pedagogy. In the later article she distances herself from views which she considers as 'structuralist' and proposes to examine the concept of intercultural competence from a post-structuralist perspective (1999:43).

There is insufficient space in this thesis to take up the full implications of the intercultural stance proposed here. Nevertheless, since Kramersch's earlier work has influenced this thesis, the development will be reviewed briefly.

2.6.1 Kramersch and 'Thirdness'

Kramersch refers in the first place to Hymes' contribution to the concept of communicative competence. She points out that the Western view of communicative competence has been influenced by 'the enlightened belief in the democratising value of symmetrical, unlimited turns-at-talk between like-minded speakers and hearers in free information exchanges, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds'(1999:42). In particular, she links this view to a definition of the work of Byram and Zarate as 'structuralist', claiming that their view of cultures and the boundaries between cultures is more rigid, more homogenous and more equal/symmetrical than they really are (ibid:43). Their work, although it shares Kramersch's concept of intercultural competence in many respects, is more influenced by sociologists such as Bourdieu and Berger and Luckmann, who stress the importance of the primary and secondary socialisation process. It is also the case that

the European Union and associated countries are faced with complex problems of equality and diversity (see Section 3.4).

Her interest in the dialectical principle of Thirdness is drawn from the semiotics of Peirce (1898-1931), the philosophy and literary criticism of Bakhtin (1981) and the cultural criticism of Bhaba (1994). According to Peirce, Thirdness is a relational process-oriented disposition, that is built in time through habit, and that allows to perceive continuity in events, to identify patterns and make generalisations (1999:34) It follows Firstness in which we apprehend reality and Secondness in which we react to it, as well acting and interacting with others. The similarity between the concept of Thirdness and the discussion above on schemata is evident. It is also interesting that Peirce uses the term 'interpretant', a sign in the mind of its receiver, which gives it meaning. Thus the intercultural speaker as interpreter can be seen as the person who, by virtue of a particular position (a third place) is able to access meaning.

The importance of dialogue in the construction of intercultural communication has already been discussed (2.4.2). In discussing Bahktin's work as it is interpreted by Holquist (1990), Kramsch stresses that cultural and personal identity does not precede the encounter, but rather that it gets constructed in language through encounter with others. 'We are the role we are playing at this particular moment *in response* to the roles played by others' (ibid:47) The other dimension – or thirdness- in this case is the historical (or potential future) one, which can be evoked in the course of dialogue. The particular example used in this article is that of a badge representing a particular political point of view common in Western Germany, which is interpreted differently by representatives of other cultures. She points out that, at the end of a heated discussion, they were able to respect each other's collective taboos and irreducible differences because, as she says 'there is always yet an-Other perspective to dualistic confrontations'. In other words, the ability to interpret allowed these language teachers to reach an intercultural stance – that of the third place (ibid:57)

In discussing Bahba's Third Space of Enunciation, Kramsch concludes that intrinsic contradictions of meaning and identity in discourse are precisely what might constitute the 'in-be-tween' space that we call inter-or cross-cultural. If we do not

expect to reach consensus in our communications, then we can view them simply as the construction of self and the interdependence of opposites. In this article, we can see that Kramersch is redefining and expanding her earlier (1993) views on 'teaching language along the cultural faultline' (1993:203-232) from an American perspective, where the need for a national consensus seems more imperative than it is elsewhere. We sense that Kramersch is highly critical of this search for consensus, which can be synonymous with imperialism – both cultural and economic.

2.6.2 The Foreign Language Learner and the Third Place

To what extent can we link the views of foreign language educators to the perspectives of the young people who choose to pursue their foreign language studies in the upper secondary school and beyond? We can criticise past models as being elitist in terms of offering access to 'high culture'. We can also criticise the present-day directives, which seem to offer only instrumental reasons for foreign language study – work abroad, selling in Europe. Although the work of Byram, Kramersch and Zarate in the domain of intercultural competence offers different approaches to the question of the Third Place, there are points in common which help to define a theoretical position. These will be summarised briefly in the interests of developing a theoretical model which might be relevant to the present study.

For Byram it seems that the Third Place is a space in which the learner can exercise critical cultural awareness. He defines this as a 'responsibility to develop a critical awareness of the values and significance of cultural practices in the other and one's own culture (1997:46) For Zarate it is the 'espace intersticiel', which allows the individual to move outside the confines of a cultural prism and develop the ability to think in a more creative and reflexive manner in order to challenge preconceptions. Kramersch, too, sees the Third Place as a necessary perspective from which to criticise the asymmetry of 'power, influence, respectability and wealth within and between our respective societies'. Other writers have linked foreign language learning with international human rights and development issues, (e.g Starkey 1995) and we might suppose that young people could be inspired to take up such positions.

2.7 Summary and Comments

It is perhaps the ability to view from another perspective, which might be the defining nature of the language and culture learner. The emphasis on the concept of interpretation implies both a 'third place' and an ability to develop mental flexibility. This chapter has attempted to trace the development of the concepts relating to culture and intercultural competence from their historical beginnings to the present day context of foreign language learning. The concept of intercultural speaker, as defined in the literature, seems to be one which would provide a secure basis for developing a number of definable competencies. It is suggested that these competencies, although drawn from a number of different fields, would enhance the role of the language speaker. Intercultural speakers should take a more critical and objective stance towards their own and other cultures, for two reasons. They would have first hand access to 'otherness' through the language and also an ability to interpret across and between cultures. Thus they would be able to contribute insights into their own and other cultures, which are often hidden from their monolingual peers. In the following chapter the review will examine ways in which such learning might be assessed.

CHAPTER THREE

Definitions and Measurements of Intercultural Competence

Introduction

In the previous chapter concepts of culture and culture teaching were examined in the context of upper secondary foreign language teaching; firstly from an historical perspective and secondly, from the standpoint of contemporary students and their teachers. The perspective of social scientists, notably Keesing, Gouldner and Gudykunst was then used in order to develop a definition of intercultural competence which would correspond with theories already defined in the work of Byram, Kramsch and Zarate. In conclusion, the concepts of Thirdness and of the Third Place, as developed by Kramsch, were examined in order to define more closely the language learner as an intercultural speaker. In this chapter, models of intercultural competence will be examined in terms of the way in which students might progress and how that progression might be measured.

There have been a number of models of cultural and intercultural competencies developed in recent years, some theoretical, concerned with precise definition of terms or states of mind, and others pragmatic, in the sense that they are directed at language teachers who seek to teach and assess for specific purposes. It has proved to be particularly difficult to establish models of intercultural competence, which might be taught and assessed in the framework of an educational system, for reasons which will become clear during this chapter. However, the fact remains that little attention will be paid to these competencies in the foreign language classroom unless they are defined in terms of the way in which progress can be judged, and subsequently assessed or evaluated. This chapter will survey some of the attempts to define progress to be found in the literature before describing the way in which existing frameworks (notably Byram 1997b) were used to structure the data collection process in the research project.

In the first place it will be useful to examine the way in which some earlier models were developed before discussing more recent theories. In Section 1 the initial focus

will be upon some social psychological models, as this approach towards culture learning has been proposed as a framework in educational terms (Meyer 1991). Specific examples will be analysed in order to discover whether such models might be suitable for the English educational system.

There have also been teaching and assessment frameworks for the classroom, developed by individual educators in the United States and most recently a set of National Standards produced by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (1996). In Europe, there has been a considerable amount of research into the question of intercultural competencies and concern to develop a form of assessment, which will enable progress to be recorded. In Section 2, the *Common European Framework of Reference* and the work of van Ek, Byram and Zarate, in particular, will be examined. In the first place, however, it will be necessary to define terminology, as there is some overlap and confusion, due to changes over a period of time and between different countries

3.1. Cultural and Intercultural

It should be pointed out that 'intercultural' has only in recent years tended to replace terms such as cultural, cross-cultural and transcultural in literature from the anglophone world. In French and German, *interculturel* and *interkulturell* are frequently equated with the British term 'multicultural', so there is still a degree of overlap and confusion and this will be evident when literature from these countries is discussed. Together with the United States, Britain, France and Germany have ethnic minority populations, whose presence implies internal cultural diversity. Although there are many interesting parallels to be drawn between the multicultural society and the question of foreign language and culture learning, there is insufficient space to develop these aspects, as far as this thesis is concerned, and the term intercultural will be defined with reference to the latter.

3.1.1 Existing Models - Defining Progress

It is possible to distinguish within the literature different approaches to the question of defining individual progress in intercultural competence. For example, social psychological models look at the changes, which take place in the individual -

usually in the context of adapting to a foreign environment. As the teacher of a foreign culture may attempt to bring about changes in students, which do not simply relate to their knowledge about the target language country, these models will be examined in order to see whether they could be applied to the classroom situation.

A second approach, which might seem obvious to educators, is that of the provision of cultural information within the syllabus, as part of the teaching programme. In France and Germany, there is already a strong tradition relating to the provision of some background knowledge of the target language culture at the upper secondary stage (*civilisation* and *Landeskunde*) and this will be touched upon, in the context of a curriculum development project (Byram and Morgan et al. 1994), which has a bearing on the subject of this chapter. It will also be discussed in the context of the *savoirs*, in Byram's (1997b) model at the end of this chapter.

In Britain, as we have seen, the use of 'cultural' in the context of language learning is related to the idea of factual knowledge about another society, particularly that obtained through literary texts and the study of certain aspects of contemporary society. At upper secondary level it is sometimes related to specific types of background knowledge, such as periods of history, political or geographical knowledge, but more often to contemporary social issues. Teachers and learners usually exercise some choice of literary text or topic. It is also likely that both groups will have their own views on the subject of culture, but there is not, as yet, an agreed definition.

Sections 3.2.3 and 3.2.4 will examine attempts made by foreign language educators and others who have sought to provide definitions in terms of the stages which might be reached by individuals who are seeking to progress towards the goal of intercultural competence. In these cases there are attempts to go beyond the provision of cultural information in order to bring about changes in attitudes and teach skills to learners.

The aim of this chapter, therefore, will be to examine some models offered by educational systems and other institutions concerned with intercultural competencies. The division between the United States and Europe may seem rather arbitrary, given

the fact that the research field is international and that the aims of educators and learners are, in many ways, similar. However, it has been retained in the interests of general clarity; and also because the existence of the *Common European Framework*, its aims and objectives, and the framework of assessment which it recommends, are particularly significant in the context of upper secondary language learning in Britain and Europe, and the question of mobility for the purposes of work and study.

3.1.2 Culture Learning - A Social Psychological Approach

As culture is a social phenomenon which engages the individual in a complex relationship with others, it is inevitable that the learner, whether in the classroom or 'in the field' will be required to change and adapt. Is it therefore possible to define stages in progress towards intercultural competence, and evaluate in some way the changes which take place in individuals? There is a substantial body of literature in this field, including analyses of the phenomenon of culture shock and its contribution to the learning process. Acton and de Felix (1986) carried out a review of a number of models of cultural adaptation, linking the cognitive and affective development involved in acculturation, with a number of models of personality development (1986:30-31)

Acton and de Felix's own four-stage model, - tourist, survivor, immigrant, citizen – is based on the learner becoming almost indistinguishable from the native speaker. Brown, too, uses a four-stage model with the specific aim of helping teachers to enable their students to move through stages of acculturation (1986). His final goal is also that of native speaker competence, and, for that reason, is not relevant to this enquiry and the concept of the intercultural speaker. Since the aim of the intercultural speaker is specifically different in that an interpreter/mediator position is sought, the following section will examine two such models, proposed by Barna (1982) and Furnham and Bochner (1982) to see whether they would help to define progress in the language teaching classroom.

3.1.3 Barna – A Definition of Intercultural Competence

Barna, a teacher of languages, draws a parallel between learning about one's own culture (enculturation) and learning about another culture (acculturation). She

defines four stages, finishing with the ability to relativise and to attempt to explain and find solutions to problems (mediate). She draws upon the literature relating to the cognitive and moral development of the individual (Piaget, Kohlberg), but it is somewhat simplified.

Stage 1 One's own reality is everyone's reality. This according to Barna, is the position of the young child or ethnocentric adult.

Such a definition may seem attractive in its simplicity. However, it may be unrealistic and counter-productive to regard ethnocentrism (seen as difficulty in perceiving other realities than one's own) as a primitive or childish state. As Gudykunst (1998:106) states: ethnocentricity is natural and unavoidable. It acts as a cohesive force in times of danger and helps to stabilise individuals within their own societies. It may also be the case that certain individuals, such as those described by Gudykunst (ibid:150-153) as 'narrow categorisers', are less likely than 'broad categorisers' to tolerate ambiguity or take an holistic view of a subject. However, the people in the former category seem to be more adept at organising and classifying information (for example), than the latter. If judgements were to be made by teachers and assessors, along the lines suggested by Barna, there might be a tendency to confuse elements which can be taught with mental structures. For example, if those who categorise 'narrowly' find it difficult to view a problem or a situation holistically, should they be penalised by an awarding body? This is a question which would have to be addressed, if socio-psychological stages were to become part of an assessment system. In addition, although the learner of a second language repeats some elements of learning the first language, an approach which assumes a childlike mentality in the learner is unlikely to be successful in the classroom.

Stage 2 Communication gives access to the reality of others. The child is aware of this reality but judges it on the basis of his own. Arbitrary values might be attributed to otherness (stupid, wrong).

We might question here whether the values attributed to otherness are, in fact, arbitrary, or whether they are integrated as part of the socialisation process and reinforced by family, school and media. If the latter were to be the case, then the

process of familiarising young people with other value systems than their own could be regarded as part of their education from an early stage. It is already the case that children from bicultural/mixed marriage backgrounds receive this broad socialisation from an early age and that many others are introduced to the multicultural aspects of their own society in the primary school. Therefore, in educational terms, the above may not be a stage in development towards intercultural competence, but rather an attitude common in young children, whose social circle is restricted.

Stage 3 Awareness of difference which entails an understanding that there are logical reasons for differences and that they can be explained.

Approaches developed by intercultural trainers and involving culture capsules/clusters or 'critical incidents' (see section 3.2.2) rely on the view that culture can be objectified and explained logically. This view, as we shall see later in this chapter, is in itself culturally defined. If discussion and explanation focused on the native as well as the target culture, then the above definition could be regarded as a stage in development. However, given that attachment to one's own culture is natural, it is unlikely that logical explanations for difference will be accepted without question. Learners must first be made aware that their own culture is 'different' to others. Given Barna's analogy with child development, we might suppose that a certain maturity would be necessary before an individual was able to 'decentre' before coming to terms with cultural differences and this question will be discussed again in the final chapter.

Stage 4 Informal learning in a foreign environment is implied at this stage. The individual is able to relativise and attempt find solutions to problems.

This stage is, in fact, that of the mediator. It has much in common with more recent definitions in the literature on intercultural competencies. If Barna is implying here that personal contact with the target culture can only take place away from the home setting, then it seems arbitrary to leave this element to the final stage of a development model. It might be the case that fieldwork experience is necessary for the development of this stage. It might also be possible to replicate the conditions in environments nearer home, a point to be discussed in the final chapter.

Comment

Although Barna's model takes as its starting point the parallel between second language and culture learning and the socialisation process, it does not provide a satisfactory framework for the purposes of discussing and evaluating progress in intercultural learning. The analogy with the socialisation process of the child does offer some guidance to educators. However, learners at a later stage of cognitive and affective development cannot simply repeat the process of socialisation, effectively returning to childhood. They need pedagogical structures, which are appropriate, and which allow them to chart their progress between stages. The above model does not offer such a framework, although it might underpin some theoretical approaches in the design of a course to prepare sojourners for a period of living in a foreign country.

3.1.4 Furnham and Bochner - Otherness and Culture Shock

Social psychological analyses of language and culture learning make frequent reference to the concept of culture shock, which, from its specific pathological beginnings (Adler (1975), Oberg (1960) has now become a common term of reference for new social experiences. The specific contribution of Furnham and Bochner (1982) and Bochner (1986) is to suggest social training to overcome difficulties experienced in overseas residence. For this reason their definitions, which relate the learner/sojourner to the other – the country and its inhabitants - will be discussed as a possible framework for the development of intercultural competence. As with Barna (and others) four definitions are suggested; the *tourist*, *chauvinist*, *marginal*, and *mediating*.

Stage 1 The *tourist* stage is discovered elsewhere in the literature as monocultural or ethnocentric. The other is objectified, photographed and watched from the outside. There may be transactional communication but the perspective of the tourist remains unchanged by the experience.

Byram and Zarate (1997) also draw a distinction between touristic and (genuine) interest in a foreign culture. The implication of these distinctions is that tourism

does not develop intercultural competence. Is this in fact the case? It is perhaps unfortunate that young linguists in Britain are encouraged by the foreign language syllabuses in the lower secondary school (GCSE) to emphasise the role of the tourist as a consumer. As holiday experiences are often learners' only contact with 'otherness' during their school lives, it would be useful, from the point of view of the development of intercultural competence, to regard tourism more positively as an initial stage of intercultural development, involving specific learning strategies. As there are many and varied forms of tourism, ranging from package holidays to independent travel, it would seem likely that a methodology could be developed which would help to initiate young people into intercultural competencies; a point which will be discussed further in the final chapter

Stage 2 The *chauvinist* stage, which is not described elsewhere in the literature, has been observed within expatriate communities. After initial excitement, contact with otherness leads to withdrawal into ethnocentricity, as represented by an expatriate community. The experience has proved to be threatening, confirming existing prejudices and stereotypes, with the result that the individual minimises all contacts with foreigners.

Unfortunately, such attitudes are also to be found in second language classrooms, where low motivation and prejudice in some pupils can lead to rejection of a new language and culture when it seems to threaten a fragile sense of self esteem. The question to be asked in terms of the language learner concerns the inevitability of the chauvinist stage. Can the experience of comparing native and foreign cultures in a systematic way help to overcome this stage? – If, indeed, it is a stage rather than a frame of mind which is unlikely to be changed by external agents. Allport, for example, in *The Nature of Prejudice* (1979) distinguishes three kinds of attitudes in respect of prejudice with regard to ethnic minorities. Some individuals seem to be basically flexible and therefore disposed to be friendly to those they perceive to be different. Some are very rigid in their attitudes and this state is virtually ineradicable. A third group is more amorphous and shifting and these could be influenced either way. We might assume that in a school where foreign language learning was obligatory, all three types might be found.

Stage 3 The *marginal* is the person who lives on the edge, observing the other. This can be a transitory stage, while learning takes place, or the person can remain in the position of permanent outsider, perhaps with limited language skills.

This description could refer to a large number of sojourners, who earn their living within a foreign culture, but whose contacts with the population remain distant. It may be that for personal or professional reasons they do not wish to integrate any further into the community. They may be more solitary individuals than the chauvinist group, whose alienation has roots in their psychological state. They may, however, feel that they would be unacceptable to the host community for reasons connected with their racial or social status. From an educational point of view, an intercultural teaching programme might enable learners to move beyond this stage. Furham and Bochner's analysis of this category of sojourner should also warn us that mere presence in a foreign culture does not, in itself, confer intercultural competence.

Stage 4 The *mediating* position involves personal growth and the growth of intercultural competencies. This person is active in representing and reconciling two (or more) cultures, seeking opportunities for contact and exchange, but does not lose basic personality and values. This final position is elaborated and defined in greater detail in Byram (1997) in the framework of five *savoirs*, and will be discussed further below (Section 3.6)

Ability to mediate between cultures, combining knowledge, skills and attitudes are evidently key factors to be considered when judging intercultural competence. However, can the stages above be described as a progression? To a limited extent, it is possible to view them as such. However, although they describe a psychological reality and, for that reason, they might be introduced in the context of a theoretical preparation for overseas experience, they do not really describe progress. It is essential for learners and teachers to feel that each stage will offer a means of progression to the next. Therefore, although social psychological models can enable educators to reflect upon their task, they do not generally take into account the dynamics of the learning process and the pedagogic structures, which will encourage progress. It is likely, therefore, that language teachers who have taken it upon

themselves to incorporate the cultural dimension will wish to consider the question of progress and achievement. For this reason, literature on the subject of progression within an academic institution will follow, beginning in the United States and moving to Europe.

3.2 Culture Learning in the United States

In the anglophone world, early theory and practice related to the concept of culture within foreign language learning is to be found mainly in the United States. The question began to be addressed there in the post-war period, because the political and economic situation led to an increased demand for personnel able to communicate in a second language rather than to translate. Problems, which were encountered during overseas placements, indicated that communication skills could not be divorced from the cultural context. The result was that professional trainers and academics were called upon to define the problems and provide practical solutions, which would enable Americans to undertake successful overseas placements. Traditional disciplines of linguistics, anthropology and sociology, together with ethnography and communication were all used to analyse the difficulties involved in intercultural communication and to build models of successful practice. Works such as *The Silent Language* (1959) and *The Hidden Dimension* (1966) by Hall and *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) by Geertz were influential, as were the training manuals such as those offered by Triandis (1975) and Brislin, Cushner, Cherrie and Yong (1986). Although the training of individuals for overseas placements proved to be the most urgent and obvious need, it was also evident that foreign language learners in the school classroom should be acquiring skills other than the purely linguistic.

3.2.1 Culture Learning in the Classroom

After preliminary work carried out by Lado (1957), Brookes (1968, 1975), Nostrand (1973, 1974), and Seelye (1974, 1984, 1994), predominated in the domain of culture teaching in the classroom context. Nelson Brookes developed new approaches to culture teaching throughout the fifties and sixties. For him the concept of culture largely concerned knowledge about the society in question. He aimed to present culture as an overview of a way of life in an organised and rational way, dividing it into elements, nodes and parameters and inventing ways in which to present it to

language students. (A summary of his approach can be found in Steele & Suozzo 1994). Although Brookes starts from the position of practitioner introducing a foreign culture to American students, the end result seems to be an unwieldy amount of disconnected knowledge. Any approach to culture learning which entailed reproducing, as far as possible, the enculturation process, would be likely to arrive at a similar position, as we have seen with regard to the work of Lantolf in Chapter 2.

Nostrand, whose work was originally concerned to start from students' perspectives, also moved towards a taxonomic procedure, the 'Emergent Model' (1978) - a detailed definition of the corpus of cultural instruction (cited in Steele & Suozzo op.cit) The definition provided is clearly an attempt to reproduce the conscious and unconscious knowledge which would be assumed to exist in an educated native speaker. It provides the basis for the earliest attempts to assess cultural competencies, which were designed for French by the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) in 1982 and 1992.

Apart from the awesome quantity of information it contains and the subsequent length of time which would be necessary for the student to reach proficiency, the static nature of such an inventory ignores the fact that culture is essentially dynamic. British teachers faced with either of the two models would be likely to regard them as unrealistic in terms of the burden imposed on all concerned. In addition, as they propose 'native speaker competence' as a goal, rather than intercultural competence, they are not relevant to this enquiry.

3.2.2 Training for Intercultural Experience

Alternative methods designed to teach cultural competence in pragmatic, direct simulations of experiences, which the sojourner might encounter, are widespread in America and have been used in Britain, although not in language teaching establishments (as far as is known). These are the culture assimilators, culture capsules and culture clusters, described briefly by Seelye (1994) and in detail by Brislin and Triandis (1986) among others (see Section 3.2 above). These devices are essentially designed for (American) adults about to visit a foreign country and wishing to avoid 'cultural blunders'. In essence they present static, easily digestible

'knowledge' about a foreign culture. There is no assumption that the learner will necessarily reflect upon his/her own culture, or that language learning will be undertaken at the same time. Although such approaches are called intercultural (or cross-cultural) they do not correspond to the definition in Section 1 and will not, therefore, be pursued in the context of this thesis.

3.2.3 A Model of Teaching and Assessment - Seelye

In the pragmatic experiential traditions of American education, Seelye has developed a number of methods of teaching and assessment based on the educational theories of Dewey (1897) and cultural theory developed by anthropologists and linguists in the American field (1994:12-27). In *Teaching Culture*, which was first published in 1974 and has been reissued in 1984 and 1994, he defines a number of end-of-course performance objectives and these will be mentioned briefly in order to summarise his approach. The British language teacher has become accustomed to plan teaching in terms of objectives and goals and may well find this approach more attractive than those proposed by Brookes and Nostrand

Goal I The Sense or Functionality of Culturally Conditioned Behaviour

Goal II Interaction of Language and Social Variables

Goal III Conventional Behaviour in Common Situations

Goal IV Cultural Connotation of Words and Phrases

Goal V Evaluating Statements about a Culture

Goal VI Researching Another Culture

Goal VII Attitudes Towards Other Societies

From an Anglo-Saxon point of view, where these approaches are taken for granted, there is much that is attractive about Seelye's approach to cultural learning. Within the framework of attitudes, knowledge and behaviour, he teaches students to conduct their own research and make their own hypotheses. The style and layout of the book are designed to inspire confidence in teachers and learners that they will acquire cultural skills/achieve intercultural competence. However, the work has two major flaws from a theoretical point of view.

In the first place, the approach he advocates tends to direct students towards understanding and analysing other cultures without reference to their own, other than an acceptance of its norms. For example the advice to students to rely on advertisements and magazines as sources for cultural information (p145) does not take into account the economic and political situations which influence the production and distribution of such texts. For example, in the case of Latin American countries, advertisements are likely to promote products and images of North America. American students using such texts would need to take into account the economic and political domination involved in the publication of the information. Although this phenomenon might be an appropriate subject for study in a language class in order to promote critical cultural awareness, it is not presented as such. Similarly, cultural 'research' conducted entirely in the students' first language (from the local library for example) will almost certainly reinforce first culture views of the target culture.

Secondly, although Seelye rejects firmly the notion of students memorising 'disembodied facts', much of the advice and exemplar material involves precisely that activity (1994:58-9, :68-9, :73-4). In short, although there are many ideas in his work which would encourage interesting classroom activities, and enable teachers to assess outcomes, there is little sense of broad design or theoretical principle to guide the reader. Neither can his approach be defined as intercultural, for the reasons outlined above.

3.2.4 Progression in Intercultural Competence - Damen

Like Seelye, Damen (1987) writes from the standpoint of the trainer of language teachers, both in the foreign language classroom and English as a second language. Most examples of practice concern the presentation of American language and culture in the multicultural classroom setting. She offers a comprehensive review of theory, research and practices in the United States at the time and is concerned to encourage the reader towards further study and discussion. Would it be possible to adapt her definitions of intercultural competence for the British educational system?

Can her suggestions be applied to other situations than that of the multicultural American classroom?

It is unfortunate that Damen's 'Paths of Culture Learning' (Table 11.3:218) do not refer to language and culture learning as such, but rather to the experience of adapting to a foreign culture, as in the examples of Barna and Bochner detailed above. She adapts the work of Kleinjans (1972.b:20), Kim (1982) Ruben (1975:168-169) producing scales of minimum to maximum social distance, low awareness to empathy, little interaction to the mediating position, and ethnocentrism to assimilation/adaptation/adjustment. While such scales might be suitable for immigrants adapting to a new culture, or even for trainers preparing learners for an overseas experience, they cannot automatically be applied to the foreign language classroom. It is especially important in the British/European context that learners should be prepared for periods of work or study in another country, as sojourners, and that some of the intercultural skills gained in the first instance should be transferable to other languages. Here again, Damen is less than helpful for she implies that each experience is unique

Anyone who plays the game of culture learning should return to Go as often as possible. The experience is never the same twice (1987:220)

This underlying assumption that learning will take place in the target language country is the main weakness of the work from the point of view of the foreign language teacher. It betrays the fact that Damen has drawn mainly from experience of teaching English to immigrant minorities in order to theorise about foreign language and culture learning in general. In addition, although there are frequent references to cultural relativity and the importance of understanding one's own culture (op.cit 67-8), the language of the text frequently betrays deeply rooted assumptions, which are bound up with an American cultural standpoint. Her general arguments are thus less convincing than they might have been, had she been closely concerned with foreign language teaching, and illustrate the remark made by Kramsch concerning attitudes to foreign language learning in the United States.

Thus, for all the interest in and rhetoric about the importance of culture in language teaching, any relativisation of language and culture by foreign

language educators would be seen as a threat to American education
(1996:101)

Therefore, although there is much that is useful in Damen's contribution to the literature, it does not fulfil its claims to be 'a practical guide to the understanding of the processes of intercultural communication and to the relationship of these processes to second/foreign language learning and teaching'. The necessary position for such a guide, as later writers in North America and Europe make clear, is that of the border, and the necessary approach will involve the ability to relativise and, ultimately to engage critically with the native and target cultures.

3.2.5 American Standards for Foreign Language Learning

Since 1982 (Provision Proficiency Guidelines App1) The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has considered various ways in which the cultural domain might be integrated into progression in language learning. Initially, culture was assumed to be a fifth skill in a model based on native speaker competence, as conceived by Brookes and Nostrand (2.2.1) In 1992, however, a sub-committee working on the question had replaced this concept by that of 'empathy towards other cultures and a perspective on our own'. Three competencies were defined, cognitive, affective and behavioural. However, the committee acknowledged the difficulties inherent in correlating the competencies with linguistic ability and they did not become part of a framework for teaching and assessing specific competencies

Finally, in 1996, *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* were published by the ACTFL in order to provide guidance to states and local schools. There are a number of innovative approaches in this document, including the attempt to integrate cultural and linguistic learning. For example, instead of four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) there are five interconnected goals; communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. Each goal area contains two or three content standards, which describe the knowledge and abilities all students should acquire by the end of their high school education. A number of sample progress indicators (for grades 4, 8 and 12) define student progress in meeting the standards. These are innovative and could form the basis of an assessment system if they were

to be developed. The document also contains a number of learning scenarios collected during the pilot study of the standards.

The question of culture is addressed in three goals explicitly and one implicitly. The three components are defined as perspectives (meaning, attitudes, values), which are linked to both practices (patterns of social interaction) and products (books, tools, foods, laws, music, games) (ibid.p43.) The language system is described as a means for attaining various outcomes...communicating, gaining cultural understanding, connecting with other disciplines. It includes the socio-linguistic elements of gestures and other forms of non-verbal communication, of status and discourse style (ibid.p29). A number of critical thinking skills are also defined so that:

Given a set of cultural issues or problems, they (the students) learn to identify, organise and analyse issues or problems so as to express informed opinions, arrive at informed conclusions, and propose solutions to problems. (ibid.p31)

Although it is stated that, 'by comparing both cultural and linguistic systems, students develop their critical thinking abilities in valuable and important ways', it is not clear that they might be encouraged to question or criticise their own cultural practices. Even at Grade 12 they are only encouraged to 'analyse the relationship between products and perspectives and compare and contrast with their own' (ibid:56) In all, despite the welcome emphasis on the importance of second language study as the only true route to the awareness of the existence of alternative views of other cultures and insights into one's own, one is finally led to conclude with Byram and Met that

Culture is presented as a reality, waiting to be discovered, observed and analysed by the learner (1999:67)

It seems that the learning of foreign languages will only enhance the American way of life and confirm existing cultural assumptions. Thus, when cultural practices involve the valuing of youth over old age are cited (op.cit:47), the implication is that the American way is a norm, against which other cultural practices are seen to be odd. If such assumptions are only encouraged by the study of other cultures, then there is a very real danger that such approaches will achieve the opposite effect from

that intended. As Starosta points out in the context of a discussion on intercultural rhetoric:

Once we have noticed 'difference' in another culture, we proceed to assign affect to our cognitions, that is voice an attitude about artifacts of the other culture. Interculturalists wisely ask us to wait before assigning values to such cognitions, to learn from, appreciate, savour such differences; but they record case after case of ethnocentrism, devaluation of the other by valuation of one's own (1984:230)

Kramersch, who eschews rhetoric and examines in more detail the intricate processes of intercultural learning also comments:

What we perceive about a person's culture and language is what we have been conditioned by our own culture to see (1998:67)

The basic human tendency towards ethnocentrism has already been discussed in the previous chapter, and so does not need to be reiterated in the context of the education system in the United States. The principles and practices set out in the Standards document offer a new contribution to the debate concerning assessment in the European and British context. However, they could not offer a complete solution to the problems of assessing intercultural competencies in the European context, for two reasons. In the first place, although there are a large number of minority languages spoken in the United States, the predominance of English is not in question. Secondly, there are differences in the organisation and structure of public education systems, which make comparisons with Europe, with its very varied languages and cultures, extremely difficult.

Comment

In many respects, literature from the United States on teaching and assessment of intercultural competencies is a source of inspiration, both in theory and practice. The variety of languages spoken, together with the relative isolation of some communities, is in some respects similar to the situation in Great Britain. However, despite its linguistic and cultural affinities with the United States, Britain is a member of the European Union. It has recently aligned itself with other states in making foreign language learning obligatory for the first five years of secondary

education. Therefore, it is to the European traditions of foreign language and culture learning that we will now turn.

3.3 Culture Learning in Europe

Foreign language learning at upper secondary level in most European countries has not followed the British pattern of specialised study, involving appreciation of literary texts in their entirety. Two different examples, the study of *civilisation* in the French system and that of *Landeskunde* in Germany can be contrasted with the system of Advanced Level. In the case of France, extracts of texts from foreign literature are studied, together with some historical, geographical and background knowledge about the countries. One might suppose that the thinking behind such an approach would be to extend the general cultural knowledge of the learner to a level considered suitable for university entrance. In Germany, the situation is somewhat more complex, in that the concept of 'background knowledge' about the country is accompanied by broader concerns relating to communicative needs and critical understanding (Buttjes in Byram 1989:60-66). In both these countries, and in most other European countries, there is a broader curriculum (including the study of a foreign language) than at upper secondary level in Britain.

Without wishing to abandon familiar traditions, it is evident that some harmonisation in terms of qualification would be beneficial to language learners themselves and their future employers. For this reason the following section will examine the work of the Council of Europe and the initial impetus for the development of a *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEF 1998). It will then review briefly the situation in Britain, in particular the teaching of culture within the Advanced Level syllabus, and the curriculum development project, based at the School of Education at Durham University. In preparation for the Methodology chapter, there will then follow a detailed examination of the CEF and of the assessment proposals offered in Byram (1997). These reviews will, it is hoped, clarify the thinking behind the approaches used to collect data for the research project.

3.3.1 The Council of Europe

The existence of the European Union, founded upon the political need to ensure peaceful, democratic and economically stable society for its citizens, has provided the impetus for language learning and cultural co-operation in the member countries. There is now widespread recognition among governments, commercial and educational establishments, and individuals that foreign language and communication skills are essential at all levels of society. In addition, increased travel and contact has brought the subject of cultural understanding between nations to the fore. In the field of research and scholarly activity, there have been many publications on the subject of the cultural dimension in foreign language learning. These have been accompanied by training workshops and conferences for teachers. Many of these have been organised and promoted by the Council of Europe.

This body, since its inception in 1949, has been active in the field of education and culture. The aims have been both practical, in terms of facilitating mobility of the workforce across frontiers, and idealistic, in terms of its promotion of activities which might bring about qualities of mind and spirit suitable for European citizens, for

If intolerance, xenophobia and internecine conflict are to be confronted effectively, it is essential that citizens share a spirit of tolerance and openness to other traditions and practices, other beliefs, other ways of categorising and expressing experience (Shiels 1996:89)

The implications of the above are that language learning will lead to tolerance and openness, a widespread assumption, which has not always been found to be true. It is partly for this reason, that the concept of linguistic competence alone has been found to be wanting and that the concept of communicative competence has been expanded to include other supporting competencies, which will be discussed in Section 3.3.2.

In the same article Shiels explains the policy and principles of the Council of Europe in respect of modern languages - that language learning is for *all*, for *life*, for the *learner*. He also explains that:

Particular importance is attached to promoting the development of the necessary attitudes, knowledge and skills to communicate in real-life contexts across cultural boundaries, so that mutual understanding may be reinforced (ibid:91)

It is clear from the above that there is both an ideological and a practical dimension to the work of the Council. At an earlier stage, the chief concern was to define the linguistic needs of European citizens for temporary work or leisure purposes. At the same time, the arrival of large numbers of immigrant workers into Europe, gave an impetus to the search for content and methodology which would be practical, and also form the basis for further learning. Thus the Threshold Level was first developed in 1975 by van Ek. It was this foundation which encouraged the initial development of the communicative approach to language teaching in Europe.

However, the concept of communication for transactional purposes was evidently insufficient and in the 1980's it began to be further refined through the work of Canale & Swain (1982). Subsequently, van Ek proposed more refined and complex definitions of communicative competence; linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, sociocultural competence and social competence (1986:41). These definitions, although extending the concept of communicative competence, were still essentially based on the premise of native speaker competence as the final aim. They did, however, indicate the way in which language learning might be developed and enriched.

In 1992 the decision was taken to further intensify language teaching in Europe by the development of a *Common European Framework of Reference* and a *European Language Portfolio*. In a paper written to introduce the Framework, Shiels stated that the new specification would pay particular attention to

- (i) sociocultural competence leading to the ability to 'bring different cultures into relation to one another' as an integral part of successful intercultural communication
- (ii) 'learner responsibility' so that learners can develop and exploit the strategies required for effective language learning and use throughout life (1996:93)

3.3.2 Teaching a Foreign Culture in Britain

As it was pointed out in the previous chapter in Section 2.1.2, changes, which would encourage communicative competence and make foreign language learning accessible to all, took place in Britain as well as in the rest of Europe. It was, perhaps, inevitable that the concern to make language learning possible for the majority of the population should lead to a situation where communicative needs, real or imagined, dominated the teaching syllabus in secondary schools in the initial and intermediate stages. Although general educational aims were not deliberately ignored, pressures on teachers in countries, where language learning had traditionally been a minority activity, such as Britain, led to a situation where 'practical needs' became the focus of syllabus design. Byram (1987,1989,1991) has analysed in depth the problems, which have arisen for both teachers and learners, as a result of this approach, and most particularly in a general introduction to the subject, *Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education* (1989), where he points out that:

If we justify language teaching – and motivate pupils- solely,
or even just mainly by putative communication needs and those
needs turn out to be non-existent, then the justification disappears
– and most of the motivation with it. (1989:11).

Following this analysis, Byram went on to propose a model of foreign language education (ibid:138) which would integrate language learning and language awareness with cultural awareness and cultural experience. This theoretical model was followed by a research report (Byram, Esarte Sarries, Taylor, 1991), which studied the cultural understanding of young learners of French. Indeed, a growing body of literature in the foreign language education field at the time (Robinson 1985, Valdes 1986, Valette 1986, Zarate 1986, Damen 1987, Wright 1988, Harrison 1990) began to influence those who were concerned to define the aims of foreign language learning. Teachers also became aware of the need to consider the cultural dimension of language learning. Directions from the Department for Education and Employment mentioned 'insights into the culture and civilisation' of the countries concerned, and 'a sympathetic approach to other cultures and civilisations'. With the advent of the National Curriculum, closer prescriptions in terms of classroom activities and the delivery of lessons were concerned to promote the cultural dimensions of foreign language learning. However, assessment of only the four

linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) has continued to be the normal pattern at all levels.

Theoretical and practical work in the field has not been without consequences, as there are a number of publications, which offer advice to the classroom teacher on the subject of the cultural dimension in the language classroom. In addition to the literature already mentioned, there have been a number of publications which encourage teachers to reflect upon the cultural dimension, offer a critical view of course books or propose classroom activities (Jones (1995), Thomalin and Stempelski (1993) McLaren (1998) Sercu (1999) Shaw (1996,2000) Pachler (1997,1999). In addition, the National Curriculum for England and Wales specifically recommends cultural learning. However, in an educational climate in which assessment plays such an important part, the difficulty involved in the assessment of the intercultural dimension of student progress in a fair and meaningful manner, means that its place in the classroom lacks clear definition. Inclusion of cultural, or indeed intercultural elements, depends solely upon the approach adopted by the individual teacher.

It is particularly difficult to justify the present situation in the case of those students who decide to continue their language studies to a level, where they might reasonably expect to work or study in a country in which the target language would be spoken. Indeed, it is in this two year period, that some developments have already taken place, notably in syllabuses proposed by various Examination Boards, following advice from government appointed bodies who have been concerned to promote the cultural dimension of foreign language learning, as has already been indicated in Section 2.1.4.

3.3.3 Curriculum Development within the Advanced Level Language Syllabus

As far as examination boards are concerned, the option of studying a non-literary topic, rather than a text, in the upper secondary phase (Advanced Level) has allowed alternative approaches to be developed. It was in the light of these changes, that a curriculum development project was planned and carried out at the School of Education in Durham in 1991-2 and reported in *Teaching-and-Learning, Language-*

and Culture by Byram and Morgan et al (1994). The main features of the project as far the teachers were concerned, were the opportunities to study theoretical aspects, to bring about changes in methodology, and to carry out fieldwork. It was also possible to design methods of assessment of intercultural competencies.

This Cultural Studies/Civilisation course, which was taught during the first year of Advanced Level French in a number of institutions in the North East of England, introduced five social elements of French culture and a variety of methodological approaches designed to encourage intercultural competencies. At this point, three inter-related areas were defined – knowledge, attitudes and skills. The attempts to assess these areas, in terms of oral and written work and a mediation exercise are explained in full (ibid.1994: 135-174) with examples taken from the project. At this point, since the work was being integrated into Advanced Level French syllabuses, both linguistic and cultural aspects were tested and marked together. As the topics were either a part of the syllabus or were otherwise considered to be appropriate for study at this level, aspects concerning knowledge alone could be assessed in the normal marking system. Attitudes and Skills were evaluated during a special ‘training day’ at the University and could be considered separately.

The difference between the above course and this thesis is the fact that, in the former it was possible to design special materials and adapt pedagogic practice. As far as this research project is concerned, every effort was made to ensure minimum interference with normal teaching and learning. In discussions relating to attitudes, skills and knowledge which might be present among upper secondary learners, the curriculum development project offers supplementary evidence from time to time. However, as far as the process of data collection and analysis for this thesis is concerned, it is necessary to find a framework to guide the process.

3.4 Choosing an Assessment Framework

In Chapter 1 (Section 1.2.1) the broad outlines of the study were set out. The aims of the study are to discover what kinds of intercultural competencies might exist among upper secondary learners of French and whether there is any improvement commensurate with linguistic progress. As the syllabuses of the time mention

cultural learning in the aims but not in the criteria for assessment, there is no way of measuring what has been taught. It is a question of discovering whether students have acquired intercultural competencies, as a result of their studies, or in other circumstances. The data are likely to supply some information about the potential of learners to develop competencies, which are not at present taught. It is hoped to use such data to contribute to current research on the question of assessing intercultural competencies. The two works which have recently been published, the *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEF) in its final form (2000) and Byram's *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence* (1997b) will now be examined in detail.

Both offer a development of the theories, which were the foundation for the earlier (1994) work cited above, in that the categories of knowledge, attitude and behaviour were now defined as *savoirs*. This term was first used by Byram and Zarate (1994), when elaborating the concept of sociocultural competence. In the context of the CEF four separate 'general competencies' are also designated by the term *savoirs* in parentheses and then elaborated in terms decided by the authors. In Byram (1997b) there are five *savoirs*, defined very closely in the author's own terms. In linguistic terms, however, some imply near-native linguistic ability and some are not linked to linguistic levels at all. Both these will now be examined in more detail.

3.5 The Common European Framework of Reference

It is evidently necessary to examine this work in detail as it makes a number of claims, which must be examined carefully by foreign language educators. The advantages of an agreed system of qualifications across borders are evident, and must be even more so in the context of linguistic and intercultural competencies. Indeed, the aims and objectives of the CEF give the impression that this is the case. Following an examination of the aims, the definitions of intercultural competencies will be examined in sections, as they appear in the Framework. Comments will be made about each definition, linking them to the present practices in the upper secondary sector and also to the aims of the research project. Finally, some comments will be made on the subject of scaling, levels and assessment, proposed by the CEF.

3.5.1 Intercultural Competencies within the Aims and Objectives of the CEF Framework

In Chapter 1 the cultural domain is mentioned on several occasions, giving the impression that the authors are aware of its importance. For example, general measures are to be taken to ensure that European populations will be able to:

1.3 achieve wider and deeper understanding of the way of life and forms of thought of other peoples and of their cultural heritage.

It was also agreed from its inception that the CEF must be *comprehensive, transparent and coherent*. (2001:7). The definition of *comprehensive* was further elaborated by reference to the fact that:

3.1.1 the development of communicative proficiency involves other dimensions than the strictly linguistic (e.g. sociocultural awareness, imaginative experience, affective relations, learning to learn etc.)

With respect to these definitions, it should be pointed out that *comprehensive* is interpreted in this context as the inclusion of intercultural competencies into language learning experience. *Transparent* implies that the competencies should be clearly discernible to teachers and learners, with formal and informal assessments being objective and fair. *Coherent* implies that the framework and the text should be free from contradictions and clearly understood by all concerned. These assumptions are made on the basis of a clear statement of objectives in Chapter 1 (2001:3). These objectives are:

- To equip all Europeans for the challenges of intensified international mobility and closer co-operation not only in education, culture and science, but also in trade and industry.
- To promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective international communication
- To maintain and further develop the richness and diversity of European cultural life, through greater mutual knowledge of national and regional languages, including those less widely taught.

- To meet the needs of a multi-lingual and multicultural Europe by appreciably developing the ability of Europeans to communicate with each other across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

All the above aims imply the acquisition of intercultural as well as linguistic competencies. In the following section the definitions will be discussed and related to this research project, in the order in which they appear in the CEF. It should be noted the term 'general competencies' is used to distinguish this section from 'linguistic competencies.' The term 'intercultural' only appears in 5.1.1.3 (Intercultural awareness) and 5.1.2.2. (Intercultural skills) However, some analogies are made between 'general' and 'intercultural' for two reasons. Firstly, in order to make the comparison with Byram's 1997 work clearer, and secondly because the authors' have used the term '*savoirs*' in their text. In the instances where a general competence would not also be considered to be intercultural, this will be made clear.

3.5.2 Intercultural Competencies Defined by Sections

In Chapter 4 of the CEF, Language use and the language user/learner, it is stated clearly that

The learner of a second or foreign language and culture does not cease to be competent in his or her mother tongue and the associated culture. Nor is the new competence kept entirely separate from the old. The learner does not simply acquire two distinct, unrelated ways of acting and communicating. The language learner becomes plurilingual and develops interculturality. The linguistic and cultural competencies in respect of each language are modified by knowledge of the other and contribute to intercultural awareness, skills and know-how. They enable the individual to develop an enriched, more complex personality and an enhanced capacity for further language learning and greater openness to new cultural experiences. Learners are also enabled to mediate, through interpretation and translation, between speakers of the two languages concerned who cannot communicate directly (2001;43).

The wording of this passage encourages the reader to expect some further clarification of the definition of the concept of 'interculturality' in the body of the chapter. However, the detail of the chapter is concerned with linguistic standards only. Even in Section 4.4.4 *Mediating activities and strategies*, (op.cit 87-8), there are only technical descriptions of the processes of interpretation and translation. There is no reference to the fact that these activities involve an intercultural dimension, implying particular skills, knowledge and attitudes.

In Chapter 5 of the CEF general and communicative competencies are further defined and advice is offered to users. Here the general competencies are set out in the following order:

- 5.1.1 Declarative knowledge (*savoir*)
- 5.1.2 Skills and Know-how (*savoir-faire*)
- 5.1.3 Existential competence (*savoir-être*)
- 5.1.4 Ability to learn (*savoir apprendre*)

The communicative language competencies (4.7.2) are divided into:

- 5.2.1 Linguistic competencies
- 5.2.2 Sociolinguistic competencies
- 5.2.3 Pragmatic competencies

3.5.3 Declarative Knowledge (*savoir*)(p101-4)

In Section 5.1.1 there is a further division into Knowledge of the world (5.1.1.1), Sociocultural knowledge (5.1.1.2) and Intercultural awareness (5.1.1.3). For the first of these, (Table 1 in the 1998 draft version) shows four domains, cross-referenced with locations, persons, objects, events operations and texts (**Appendix IV**) These relate to contemporary life in a modern, European (First World) setting. In addition, it is recommended that 'factual knowledge concerning the country or countries in which the language is spoken, such as its major demographic, economic, and political factors, together various classes of entities be included' (p102).

The second, Sociocultural Knowledge, is further defined as knowledge of the society and culture of the communities or community, of sufficient importance to merit special attention. It is likely to lie outside the learner's previous experience and may well be distorted by stereotypes. Examples are given of 1 Everyday living, 2. Living conditions, 3. Interpersonal relations, 4. Major values beliefs and attitudes in relation to a wide variety of factors, (e.g. social identity, occupation, tradition, the arts), 5. Body language, 6 Visiting conventions, 7 Ritual behaviour (pp102-3).

The third category in this section, Intercultural Awareness is described as knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation between the world of origin and the world of the target community. It should include awareness of regional and social

diversity and a wider range of cultures than those carried by the learner's L1 and L2. In the next sections these three categories will be examined in more detail in order to discover whether they would provide a framework for the collection of data in respect of the intercultural competencies of a group of upper secondary learners of French.

3.5.4. Discussion on Declarative Knowledge

It is suggested that 'geographical, demographic, economic and political factors might be particularly important, together with 'classes of entities...and their properties and relations' (p 102). In Chapter 6 (6.4.6.1)p147-8, the authors state that

With regard to knowledge of the world, learning a new language does not mean starting afresh. Much if not most of the knowledge that is needed can be taken for granted.....Judgement is needed in deciding such questions as: Does the language to be taught or tested involve a knowledge of the world which in fact is beyond the learners' state of maturation, or outside their adult experience? If so, it cannot be taken for granted. The problem should not be avoided.(p148)

The authors then mention language textbooks to 'give young people a structured world-view', but they do not develop this point. In Section 6.4.6.3 there are a series of suggestions for treating non-language-specific competencies in language courses. (a) They could be assumed to exist already or be developed elsewhere. (b) They could be treated *ad hoc* as and when problems arise. (c) Texts could be selected or constructed to illustrate new areas and items of knowledge. (d) There could be special courses or textbooks dealing with area studies. (e) An intercultural component designed to raise awareness of the relevant experiential, cognitive and sociocultural backgrounds of learners and native speakers respectively. (f g h) through role play, subject teaching in L2 and direct contact with native speakers and authentic texts.

In the light of the above, we might consider what knowledge about the world of native and target culture might be acquired by students before they begin an upper secondary course. Some further guidance is to be found in the literature, as Byram & Zarate refer to the 'national and regional memory of the community being studied' (1994:11). This reference might be interpreted as history and geography, which in

Britain are studied as obligatory separate subjects up to the age of 14 and as optional subjects to 16. At present, there is no requirement for such knowledge to be linked to foreign language study. Therefore, for English learners, it cannot be presumed to exist in the first place, and therefore to be modified or restructured during foreign language learning.

Comment

It is possible to study aspects of European history and geography in the lower secondary school. Indeed, a number of schools are experimenting with bilingual education in this context. It is also likely that some knowledge would be acquired incidentally, through television or a visit. It is evidently necessary to ascertain whether such knowledge does exist in a sample of upper secondary students and whether, in fact, such knowledge is modified and restructured. Data to be collected during the project will, it is hoped, offer further information on the subject. If the assumptions made by the authors of the CEF are based on anecdotal evidence or wishful thinking, rather than evidence, then the document cannot fulfil its claim to be 'comprehensive, transparent and coherent'.

3.3.5 Sociocultural Knowledge

Sociocultural knowledge is defined in much greater detail in the CEF than declarative knowledge. Some elements correspond to the concept of 'empirical' as defined in the previous section, as they will have been acquired during students' own socialisation, as far as their own culture is concerned. Elements related to the foreign language may be acquired in the classroom or during a visit. Seven separate categories are listed, which are said to be features of any European society (p40) As far as categories 1. (everyday living), 5.(body language), 6.(visiting) and 7.(ritual behaviour) are concerned, it seems likely that students in the upper secondary sector would have knowledge concerning their own society gained from their own experience, and limited knowledge about France, which they had obtained from personal experience or other sources. Questioning during the data collection process should reveal some information relating to the above categories.

The other categories - 2. (living conditions), 3. (interpersonal relations), 4 (major values, beliefs and attitudes in relation to a very wide range of factors) (p41) seem to be too specialised for younger learners to have studied in any depth, even in the context of their own culture. They would need to be taught as components of an upper secondary course. It is already the case that sociocultural knowledge about France is taught incidentally in the upper secondary classroom, as the majority of texts chosen for study and discussion, from course books or other sources would come under this heading. For example, topics such as food and drink, leisure activities, education (not mentioned in the CEF) housing conditions, relations between the sexes/generations, race and community relations, regional cultures, security, the arts and the European Community, are among those covered during preparation for Advanced Level French examinations.

The majority of such texts, and the various authentic sources, used as supporting material, do supply some incidental cultural information. However, it is essential to distinguish between sources which offer linguistic information and provide a stimulus to oral and written communication, from those where language and culture teaching are closely integrated, and texts are chosen with this factor in mind. At present, it can be observed that course books for upper secondary French, for example, are largely designed to be attractive to readers, to present new lexis or syntax, to encourage expressive skills, and only incidentally to provide cultural information. There is, in fact, no reason why a course book should offer a systematic approach to sociocultural knowledge, when it is not regarded as part of the syllabus. Nevertheless, more attention has been paid in recent years to the question of cultural knowledge, and the question of the sources and structuring of such knowledge might well be addressed by writers of course books.

Following the arrival of non-literary topics in recent years, a small proportion of marks is awarded for the knowledge component. There is now more encouragement for teachers and learners to engage with this aspect of foreign language learning and it may be possible to obtain more information on the subject during data collection. However, my personal experience over several years as an examiner of non-literary topics in the oral and written component of Advanced Level French examinations

would indicate that intercultural competencies are not necessarily acquired in this manner. It is frequently the case that students are left to prepare such topics on their own, using whatever resources might be available. Lacking a cultural framework for their study, they seem to use the only one they know, their own, or invent missing details from any available stereotype.

It is evident that the authors of the CEF are aware of such problems, as they specifically warn that sociocultural knowledge 'is likely to lie outside the learner's previous experience and may well be distorted by stereotype.' (p102) The question of stereotypes will be discussed further in the concluding chapter. In relation to this section, however, some examples of classroom and examination practice are pertinent. The study of sociocultural topics, such as 'old age' or 'immigration' without reference to the broader framework of social identity are both likely to lead to confusion, stereotyping and distortion when the learner acquires knowledge without context. An intercultural approach ought to lead to a deepening of knowledge about the home culture, seen through the eyes of another, and valid comparisons between the home and target cultures. Use of 'authentic' texts and information downloaded from the Internet (from the *Front National* on immigration for example) does not in itself ensure intercultural competence.

Finally, it appears that the taxonomy of topics presented in Section 5.1.1.2 is rather arbitrary in its divisions. For example an intercultural approach to the study of a topic such as 'Religion in France' would entail the analysis of religion in British society in the first place and subsequently a selection of various features in the list: public holidays, relations among groupings, ethnic minorities, history, national identity, education, the arts, observances and rites, tradition and social change; all this together with extracts from literary and philosophical texts. This section may claim to be comprehensive, but cannot claim to be coherent, as so little guidance is offered to users.

3.5.6 Intercultural Awareness

The CEF definition (p103) is 'knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and differences) between the world of origin and the world of

the target community', including awareness of the regional and social diversity of both worlds. The use of the term 'intercultural' instead of 'cultural' here is also an official recognition that the 'cultural dimension' is more complex than the addition of factual knowledge about the target society. In this it offers a new departure for the study of languages at upper secondary level. Various examination boards, reviewed by Byram & Morgan (1994:140-7) also state that their syllabuses encourage reflection on cultural similarities and differences.

In addition, we can assume that some informal comparison is made between native and target cultures when students encounter new information and experiences. However, Zarate (1986,1994) and Byram (1989,1991,1994) among others (See Chapter 2), have explained clearly that the 'cultural filter system' (or schemata), through which we all try to make sense of new experiences through our prior knowledge, makes cultural comparison particularly difficult. It would be helpful if users could look to the CEF for guidance in order to help their students to structure their learning experiences, both inside and outside the classroom.

Unfortunately, although the advice offered (on page 104) does ask users to reflect upon prior and new experience and knowledge, and the awareness of the relation between home and target cultures, there is no further guidance in this section. In Chapter 6 it is suggested that 'an intercultural component designed to raise awareness of the relevant experiential, cognitive and sociocultural backgrounds of learners and native speakers respectively' (6.4.6.3) would achieve such an objective. However, the other suggestions in the same section concern methodologies, which are already widely used in schools. The user is left with the impression that this section is lacking in both coherence and transparency.

The systematic approach adopted in the Durham project and described in Section 3.3.3 enabled the students concerned to view aspects of their own culture from an outsider's point of view, or to 'decentre' before embarking on each section of their studies. This process seemed to provide a solid foundation for the establishment of intercultural competencies, as it made learners aware of the unconscious nature of much of their own 'knowledge'. Comparisons alone, examples of which abound in the media and elsewhere, do not automatically bring about intercultural awareness. It

could, however, be the case that students of a foreign language acquire the ability to 'decentre' as a concomitant of their studies and efforts will be made during the study to discover whether this is the case. The wording of the CEF, however, does not lend itself to definitions of 'decentre' or 'relationship between home and target culture', and these will have to be sought elsewhere.

3.5.7 Skills and Know-How

These are further subdivided into two categories:

- 5.1.2.1 Practical skills and know-how
- 5.1.2.2 Intercultural skills and know-how

In the first of these sections practical skills are further defined in connection with daily routines at home, at work or at leisure. There is no further mention of problems, which might arise when the skills are being carried out in a foreign environment. Social skills are related to conventions specified in 5.1.1.2 as 5. (body language), 6. (visiting) and 7. (ritual behaviour) Learners are enjoined to 'act in accordance and perform' (p42). In this respect the authors are subscribing to theory and practice in intercultural 'training' which has already been mentioned in the previous chapter. It is based on the premise that the learner should be expected to mimic behaviours and practices in the target culture in order to make him/herself accepted. Thus we return to the image of the language learner as 'second class citizen', rather than interpreter and mediator on the borderline between two cultures. Kramsch, writing on the subject of authenticity, questions whether cultural competence includes the obligation to behave in accordance with the social conventions of a given speech community for

The ability to behave like someone else is no guarantee that one will be more easily accepted by the group who speaks the language, nor that mutual understanding will emerge. (1993:181)

Obviously, conventions and routines have to be observed by a visitor to a foreign country. However, advice to blend in to a foreign environment and mimic others can put an enormous strain on the visitor. In addition, it might well be disconcerting, rather than reassuring, for the hosts, who in most circumstances will see their visitor as a representative of his/her home culture. Intercultural skills would enable the

individual to maintain a balance between the two, by inhabiting a 'third place'. Enquiries will be made during the data collection process in order to obtain information from the participants on the subject of behaviour in a foreign environment.

In the second section (5.1.2.2) the definitions which concern intercultural skills and know-how (p104-5), coincide more closely with definitions of intercultural competence which are used in this thesis. They are

the ability to bring the culture of origin and the foreign culture into relation with each other;

cultural sensitivity and the ability to identify and use a variety of strategies for contact with those from other cultures;

the capacity to fulfil the role of cultural intermediary between one's own culture and the foreign culture and to deal effectively with intercultural misunderstanding and conflict situations.

The ability to overcome stereotyped relationships

This section could be used as a guide by those who prepare students for intercultural experience. Further concepts relating to interpretation itself, power relations, and the borderline position of the mediator, need to be more transparent for the purposes of a wide range of users, but this section is suitable for the research project. Accordingly, participants will, in the course of semi-structured interviews at the beginning and end of the project, be asked to describe hypothetical situations, in which they would act the role of cultural intermediary. Details of these are to be found in the following (Methodology) chapter

3.5.8 Existential Competence (*savoir être*)

In this section of the CEF it is stated that the communicative activity of users/learners is also affected by 'selfhood factors connected with their individual personalities, characterised by the attitudes, motivations, values, beliefs, cognitive styles and personality types, which contribute to personal identity' (p105)

The inclusion of this section raises questions of a philosophical and ethical nature, which cannot be given the attention they require in the context of this thesis. There

are, however, a number of comments, which relate to aspects of the research to be conducted and they will be discussed in the order in which they appear in this section of the CEF.

1 and 2 Attitudes and Motivations

There is already a substantial body of literature, which links success in language learning, as with almost any other endeavour in life, with positive attitudes and motivations. Gardner & Lambert (1972), whose 'integrative orientation' is discussed in relation to the Questionnaire designed at the beginning of the project, were the first of many in the field. The definitions provided here correspond largely to those expressed in Byram & Zarate (1994) and by others in the fields of intercultural competence and motivation for language learning (Gardner 1985, Dörnyei 1990, 1994, Chambers 1993). However, it should be pointed out that, in matters relating to affect and judgements on the attitudes and motivations of pupils, it is difficult to avoid the personal and the idiosyncratic. Whereas many teachers seem to agree that they have a responsibility to motivate their pupils towards positive attitudes concerning the target culture (Byram, 1989, Byram & Risager 1999), it might prove difficult to impose this, as a component of intercultural competence, taught within the classroom. As Wright remarks:

Whether or not teachers can be equipped with the ability to encourage positive attitudes and sympathetic approaches and, more particularly, to assess these, it is not at all clear that they will actually have the desire to do so (1996:36).

The question of attitudes will be taken up again during the discussion of Byram's definitions in section 3.6. below. It will also be discussed in more detail in the Methodology chapter in the Section 4.3.3., devoted to the Questionnaire.

3, 4 and 5 Values, Beliefs, Cognitive Style

There is very little elaboration in the CEF on the first two of these factors. The authors confine themselves to further definitions of the terms and it is therefore difficult to comment upon their views. British schoolteachers are already accustomed to a view of the profession, which assumes that, even in non-sectarian schools, they will promote widely accepted beliefs and values of their own culture.

Although these are by no means as specific as the ‘republican values’ which French teachers are supposed to encourage in their pupils, they are equated with the teacher’s position ‘*in loco parentis*’. Within the present study, this question will be limited to some discussion with teachers about the teaching of ‘French values’, but will not be pursued deliberately within the scope of student interviews. There will be further reference below, however, in the context of a discussion on Byram’s definitions of *savoir s’engager* in Section 3.6

The question of cognitive style would be familiar to teachers, as each subject area has distinct requirements in this respect. For example, students of science need mathematical skills and the ability to pay attention to detail. Students of English literature require imagination and critical abilities. If the intercultural speaker is to be successful, it may well be that a cognitive style should be recommended to learners. In this context, the work of Gudykunst, who refers to ‘broad and narrow categorisers’, has already been mentioned in Chapter 2, and this point could be developed in the context of cognitive style. However, the CEF only offers a series of oppositions (convergent/divergent; holistic/analytic/synthetic). Such an approach cannot in itself enable users to make decisions in this very important area. It is another example of the fact that the CEF makes some claims for coherence and transparency, which cannot be justified.

5. Personality Factors

The assumption that ‘personality’, defined by psychological testing or personal impression, will influence success in language and culture learning, as in most endeavours, is widespread. In the CEF a long list of ‘personality factors’ is set out in a list, with an implied continuum between two extremes. Ethical and pedagogic issues are mentioned and it is further stated that ‘the development of an intercultural personality involving both attitudes and awareness is seen by many as an educational goal in its own right.’ However, these ethical and pedagogic issues are raised, without clear guidance being offered to users. What is the purpose of the list of oppositions? Are learners to be taught to move from one end of a continuum to another? If so, in which direction should they move? One example of the personality theories on which this approach is based is the extrovert/introvert opposition, found in the work of Eysenk (1970).

Commenting on these theories, Stern notes that

If we emphasise the interpersonal aspect of language learning, extroversion would be an asset, but introversion might well be advantageous to the systematic study of language (1983:380)

Such personality theories, as applied to foreign language learning tend to support the idea that extroverts make better communicators and are therefore more successful language learners. It might also be supposed that they would make better intercultural speakers. However, those who communicate well in their native language are sometimes frustrated by the difficulty of communicating in a foreign language and abandon the project. In addition, the introvert might well be more observant, or a better listener. If this were true such personalities would possibly make better intercultural speakers. It is difficult to imagine teachers carrying out personality tests in order to make judgements about their students in this respect.

It is also difficult to make firm judgements about the personality of students at this age as they are in the post-adolescent stage of rapid development. There is insufficient space to develop the question of the cognitive and affective development of foreign language learners at this stage. However, it is interesting to note that Wadsworth, in his commentary on the work of Inhelder and Piaget in this domain, makes reference to the fact that the post-16 learner begins to move beyond the egocentric stage which is adolescence. In the past this stage coincided with entrance into an occupation or professional training and this was held to be the focal point of the *decentering process* (my italics) (1991:131). It is certainly important that students begin to learn new skills and competencies at an appropriate stage in their development, as Byram & Morgan point out (1994:31-5) in a discussion on attitudes to foreign countries and people. The point at which more critical analysis is encouraged in other areas of the curriculum is the upper secondary sector. It would seem, therefore that, after the egocentric phase of adolescence is passed, young people would be able to visualise themselves in different surroundings and envisage a number of different viewpoints.

3.5.9 Ability to Learn (*savoir apprendre*)

According to the CEF, this aspect is divided into four components, language and communication awareness (5.1.4.1), general phonetic skills (5.1.4.2), study skills (5.1.4.3) and heuristic skills (5.1.4.4) (pp106-8). The first and fourth of these will be examined in more detail, but not the second and third which concern linguistic aspects. The definition of language and communication awareness is interesting in that it offers a parallel to intercultural learning.

Sensitivity to language and language use, involving knowledge and understanding of the principles according to which languages are organised and used, so that the new experience can be assimilated into an ordered framework, welcomed as an enrichment and therefore more readily learnt and used, rather than resisted as a threat to the learner's already established linguistic system which is believed to be normal and 'natural' (p107).

If we substitute the word culture for language, the following statement might apply to cultural awareness, or the act of learning about a foreign culture.

Sensitivity to culture and cultural practices, involving knowledge and understanding of the principles according to which cultures are organised and used (function), so that new experience can be assimilated into an ordered framework, welcomed as an enrichment and therefore more readily learnt and used (understood), rather than resisted as a threat to learner's already established cultural system, which is believed to be normal and natural

Of all the competencies involved in gaining knowledge and understanding of other cultures, that of the ability to learn is possibly most important in the context of this thesis. As has already been argued in the preceding chapter, intercultural competence in the fullest sense of the term implies foreign language competence. If the authors of the CEF had used the above paragraph as a starting point in their definition of general/intercultural competencies, then it is possible that this section might have achieved the comprehensiveness, coherence and transparency it sought.

An intercultural approach to foreign language learning would involve the learner in sensitisation to the home culture as well as the target culture. It would also entail knowledge and understanding of the general principles which govern the establishment of cultural frameworks, such as the mental processes which allow individuals in every society to situate and normalise their own experiences and

understanding of the world around them. A clear understanding of the use of stereotypes and the need to progress beyond their limitations by the use of techniques such as participant observation and ethnographic enquiry would enable learners to construct an ordered framework, into which new information could be introduced in appropriate sequence. Such an approach, which was used in the Durham project (Byram & Morgan et al 1994) and the Ealing project (Roberts et al 2001) is likely to be viewed as an enrichment.

It might be that the Advanced level syllabuses, which are at present followed in the upper secondary sector, which tend to encourage arbitrary choices of topic areas and lay heavy emphasis on linguistic progression, are seen as threatening by some learners. Threatening because the subject is outside the learners' own experience and cannot be fitted into an existing cultural framework. When the issue is partially avoided by the choice of a topic common to the target and home cultures (immigration, drugs, smoking, leisure activities), teachers and learners are encouraged by the presentation of such subjects in some course books, to assimilate rather than compare. Such an approach has the virtue that it encourages oral and written expression on contemporary topics. However, in my experience of examining such topics, there is rarely any serious comparison made, which takes account of cultural difference and involves change of schemata.

5.1.4.4 Heuristic skills

In terms of intercultural competencies, heuristic skills can be interpreted as 'coming to terms with new cultural experiences, bringing other competencies to bear, such as observation, understanding the significance of new practices, behaviour and events as they are encountered in the target culture (p108). This definition again refers to comments made above and discussion on schemata in Chapter 2 (2.2.3) It was pointed out that learners had great difficulty in adjusting their schemata to information which seemed to conflict with their own experience of life. These skills are likely to be more difficult to acquire than the authors lead us to suppose. This is particularly likely to be case if learners are encouraged to become independent and to search for new information. There are pedagogical issues here, which are related to the skills of participant observation and ethnography, to teacher training and to field

work, which cannot be developed at this point. However, some comments relating to study and exchange visits and the development of these skills will be made in the final chapter.

The comments above have been based on a detailed study of the advice in the CEF relating to general competencies and language learning. Although there are a number of aspects, which can be related to the possible development of intercultural competencies in language learners, it does not offer a series of definitions of competencies, which would be entirely satisfactory for the purpose of conducting a longitudinal study in which these were measured. However, it will be necessary at this point to examine the assessment proposals offered by the CEF to discover whether the definitions of linguistic progress could be adapted in any way for such purposes.

3.5.10 Assessment and Common Reference Levels

The proposals set out in Chapter 3 of the CEF are very detailed, as far as linguistic skills are concerned. As close analysis of the levels described is not appropriate in the context of this thesis, this section will merely confine itself to some brief points with reference to particular sections.

Tables 1, 7, and 8 (**Appendix V**) are proposed as sets of defined Common Reference Levels. It is evident that levels are to be conceived in linguistic terms, as they are distinguished in terms of Basic, Independent and Proficient User; Listening, Reading, Spoken Interaction, Spoken Production and Writing (Table 7) and Comprehension, Conversation, Transaction Discussion (Table 8). It is evident from the higher level descriptors (B2, C1, C2) that the reference point is the educated native speaker. For example, in Table 7 (**Appendix V**), there are references to: listening to television programmes and films without too much effort, understanding any kind of spoken language even when delivered at fast native speed, reading with ease all forms of the written language, formulating ideas with precision and relating a contribution skilfully to those of other speakers, presenting clear detailed description of complex subjects, writing different kinds of texts in an assured personal style appropriate to the reader in mind. All the definitions in these categories take the educated native

speaker as the standard, differing only in level of education and confidence. None of them can be achieved without reference to the cultural dimension.

For teachers and learners such definitions present standards which may be reached by the bilingual or the exceptionally gifted linguist. They are not intercultural in the sense that two languages and cultures are put into relationship with each other. No claim is made by the authors of the CEF in respect of intercultural competencies which might be present at higher linguistic levels. However, we must ask whether it would not be more useful to all concerned, if the higher level definitions were to be 'intercultural' (B2,C1,C2). This aspect will be further discussed in the final chapter of the thesis

In Section 4.4.4 in the following Chapter (Mediating activities and strategies Table 9 (p138) offers an alternative scale Reception, Interaction, Production and Mediation. In this case it might be expected that intercultural competencies be implicated, as interaction and mediation entail two (or more) cultures. However, all definitions provided at this point concern linguistic competencies. Mediation is defined in technical terms (interpretation, translation, summarising) with no mention of interaction between cultures or the complex skills and knowledge required for its practice. This seems to be an astonishing omission, given the importance of mediation in so many spheres of intercultural interaction.

3.5.11. Conclusions Relating to the Thesis

The Common European Framework offers much scope for reflection on intercultural competencies. In certain areas the definitions are precise and in others wide-ranging. Some elements have offered definitions, which would be suitable as part of a framework for the data to be collected from participants However, it remains the case that the definitions provided do not, as they stand, offer a comprehensive framework for intercultural learning. They are insufficiently clear and there is a lack of distinction between observable skills and knowledge, which can be evaluated and personality traits and lists of learning activities, which do not form a coherent pattern. The question of transferable skills, which are independent of a specific language foreign language, but which can only be developed as part of the learning

of a particular foreign language (Byram and Zarate:1994) are not mentioned. Although a framework, published under the aegis of a body such as the Council of Europe, would have the potential to transform the nature of language learning for people who become sojourners in other countries, it will not do so until its objectives are seen to be achievable and assessable. It was therefore decided to study Byram's proposals for the teaching and assessment of intercultural communicative competencies in order to construct a framework for the longitudinal study.

3.6 Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence

In this section there will follow a review of the teaching and assessment objectives proposed by Byram (1997b) on the basis of *savoirs*. Byram does not propose his work solely as a framework for assessment of intercultural competencies but rather as

A refinement of the definitions used earlier and a step towards describing teaching and assessment. (1997b:50)

However, later in Chapter 5 (ibid:91) the five *savoirs* (*savoir être*, *savoir comprendre*, *savoir apprendre/faire*, and *savoir s'engager*, and *savoirs* as an entity) are examined in turn to show how assessment can be applied. It is these suggestions which will be examined below. It is not assumed that would necessarily apply to the group of learners to be studied during the research project. It is already clear that the definitions are abstract in the sense that a particular user would have to adapt them to the needs of learners at an appropriate stage. This will be the purpose of the following sections, which will be followed by a summary and conclusions. A list of the definitions is supplied below for ease of reference.

DEFINITIONS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Savoir être

Attitudes: *curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own*

Objectives:

- (a) Willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality, as distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable.
- (b) Interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one's own and in other cultures and cultural practices.
- (c) Willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment.
- (d) Readiness to experience the different stages of adaptations to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence.
- (e) Readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction.

Savoirs

Knowledge: *of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and one's interlocutor's country and the general processes of societal and individual interaction.*

Objectives (knowledge of /about)

- (a) Historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries.
- (b) The means of achieving contact with interlocutors from another country (at a distance or in proximity), of travel to and from, and the institutions which facilitate or help resolve problems.
- (c) The types of cause and process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins.
- (d) The national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries.
- (e) The national memory of one's interlocutor's country and perspective on them from one's own country.
- (f) The national definitions of geographical space in one's own country, and how these are perceived from the perspective of other countries.

- (g) The national definitions of geographical space in one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own.
- (h) The processes and institutions of socialisation in one's own and one's interlocutor's country.
- (i) Social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's.
- (j) Institutions and perceptions of them, which impinge on daily life within one's own and one's interlocutor's country and conduct and influence relationships between them.
- (k) The processes of social interaction in one's interlocutor's country.

Savoir comprendre

Skills of interpreting and relating; ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own

Objectives (ability to)

- (a) Identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins.
- (b) Identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunctions in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present.
- (c) Mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena.

Savoir apprendre/faire

Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communications and interaction.

Objectives (ability to):

- (a) Elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events and develop an explanatory system susceptible of application to other phenomena.
- (b) Identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations.
- (c) Identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances.

- (d) Use in real-time an appropriate combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact with interlocutors from a different country and culture taking into consideration the degree of one's existing familiarity with the country, culture and language and the extent of difference between one's own and the other.
- (e) Identify contemporary and past relationships between one's own and the other culture and society.
- (f) Identify and make use of public and private institutions which facilitate contact with other countries and cultures.
- (g) Use in real-time knowledge, skills and attitudes for mediation between interlocutors of one's own and a foreign culture.

Savoir s'engager

Critical cultural awareness/political education: *an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.*

Objectives (ability to):

- (a) Identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures.
- (b) Make an evaluative analysis of the documents and events, which refers to an explicit perspective and criteria.
- (c) Interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges in accordance with explicit criteria, negotiating where necessary a degree of acceptance of those exchanges by drawing upon one's knowledge, skills and attitudes.

3.6.2 The Use of the Term *Savoirs*

In the period following the Durham curriculum development project (Byram and Morgan et al 1994), further theoretical consideration was given to the problem of definition of competencies for the purposes of evaluation by Byram & Zarate under the aegis of the Council of Europe in the field of sociocultural competencies. *La compétence socioculturelle dans l'apprentissage et l'enseignement des langues* (1995) began to deal with the evaluation of competencies under the headings of four of the *savoirs* (*savoir-être, savoir-apprendre savoirs and savoir-faire*). The (1997b) work in question was a development in the sense that *savoir comprendre and savoir*

s'engager were also defined. Essentially, the three original areas (attitudes, knowledge, skills) are expanded and refined into the concepts defined as *savoirs*. The use of the French language here is particularly apt, as '*savoir*' can be interpreted as a plural noun, knowledge(s) and also as a verb – to know how to. In this way the definitions can be more precise in that, in the latter case, *savoir* is further combined with another verb. In this way too, the English terms 'attitudes' and 'skills' can be avoided, and with them a certain amount of confusion, due to the fact that both are interpreted broadly. The distinction is made particularly clear in the case of attitude, where the English term is less apt than the French.

3.6.3 Attitudes or *Savoir-être* ?

For example, an 'attitude' is defined by the Shorter Oxford Dictionary as settled behaviour or manner of acting, as representative of feeling or opinion. We might suppose that, although such a disposition could be subject to change, it is essentially personal and deep-seated. As we have seen from the literature (Byram & Risager 1998, Wright 1996) teachers of foreign languages are likely to try to encourage positive attitudes to speakers of those languages. However, they would be unlikely to agree to any proposal, which involved assessment of their pupils' attitudes, both for ethical and for practical reasons. The French term, however, is more precise and less demanding of the individual, for '*savoir-être*' would literally entail knowing how to be/behave in a situation involving intercultural interaction. It does not necessarily entail a fundamental change of attitude and can therefore be viewed objectively by an assessor.

However, Byram (1997b) does not draw a distinction between two meanings. He discusses an assessment of attitudes which would, for the most part, involve learners in expressing preferences over a period of time and collecting evidence in a portfolio (ibid:95), an activity which might well be suitable for the undergraduate learner, where fieldwork is possible during the compulsory period abroad, but which is unlikely to be feasible at upper secondary level. One might, however, suppose, at this level, that *savoir-être* could be regarded as a component of certain assessment activities, which entailed taking up a position in order to deal with a situation involving misunderstanding or conflict. The ability to question previously accepted

values, together with an understanding of the phenomena relating to culture shock, could also be integrated into tasks which involved demonstrating other skills.

To judge from the information available from literature on cognitive development (Wadsworth 1991, Piaget 1959), it seems likely that the upper secondary learner would be at a stage where s/he would be able to 'decentre' from the home culture. At this point, young people who have taken the decision to undertake post-compulsory education are expected to analyse and criticise rather than memorise and reproduce. Various culture learning activities which entailed 'discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena' (b) could be developed on the basis of material already used in the classroom. We might also suppose that young people who had opted to study a foreign language would also be willing to 'question the values and presuppositions' in their own environment (c). A period of residence involving adaptation and interaction, and engaging with the conventions and rites (d) and (e) would also be envisaged by this group, according, for example, to Marshall (2000:57). Efforts will be made during the data collection to discover more information on this subject.

As far as assessment is concerned, it might be possible to link this *savoir* with *savoir-faire* and *savoir s'engager* in an activity designed to cover a number of skills. There are, however, a number of implications in Byram's definitions of *savoir être* which are problematic when we consider assessment at this and other levels.

For example, Byram's definition of objective (a) points to a situation in which the young language learner could encounter conflict between different subject areas.

The intercultural speaker is interested in the other's experience of daily life in contexts not usually presented to outsiders through the media or used to develop a commercial relationship with outsiders; is interested in the daily experience of a range of social groups within a society and not only that represented in the dominant culture. (ibid:91)

The definition is political in nature, aligning the academic community with an egalitarian, rather than a commercial or hierarchical world-view. If, for example, the student were to undertake an intercultural language learning course as well as a business studies course at intermediate or advanced level, it is possible that the term 'intercultural competence' would be interpreted in terms of gaining commercial

advantage. This point illustrates the dilemma faced by academics in the field of intercultural competencies, as their services are most in demand in the commercial field. Refusal on their part to engage with the ethical dimension of commercial practices is one solution to the dilemma. However, if the educators particularly mentioned in this thesis, together with others such as Pennycook (1999), and Starkey (1995), do not involve themselves in the intercultural education and training of those who earn their living in commerce, then the field is left to those who are less qualified and possibly with fewer scruples. The political engagement implied in the definition of *savoir s'engager* ought to include questions of commercial exploitation and globalisation. Further research into the ethical dimension of commercial practices in the international context and the establishment of codes of conduct might be a solution to this dilemma, rather than a refusal to implicate language learners in commercial practices.

3.6.4 *Savoirs*

The task of assessing knowledge about a culture is, seemingly, a simple and objective task. The best-known attempt to do this is perhaps that of Hirsch (1974) who provided a list of 200 items, which Americans should know in order to take part in their own culture and communicate with others. The frameworks proposed by Brookes and Nostrand, already mentioned, followed a similar line of thought, in that they imply that a certain body of knowledge about France is implied in the term 'native speaker'. There has never been a fixed knowledge component prescribed as part of an upper secondary language learning course in Britain, only prescribed texts or topics. Is there an argument for a more prescriptive approach, in particular that proposed by Byram and concerning historical and geographical knowledge about the home and target cultures, and knowledge relating to the processes and institutions of socialisation in one's own and one's interlocutor's country?

In the lower secondary school, there are a number of 'prescribed topics' for the examinations at 16 plus (GCSE). These cover the supposed needs of the sixteen year-old, who might visit a country where the language is spoken or entertain a visitor. Although advice to teachers in National Curriculum documents for this stage (Key Stage 4) suggests a variety of interesting and imaginative approaches, it is rare

to find students who are familiar with material which goes beyond the requirements of the GCSE examinations when they begin their upper secondary courses. It seems that we already have a prescriptive approach and that there might be some resistance to a widening of the boundaries, unless there was a compensating reduction or flexibility in other areas.

Data collected during this project should shed some light on the question of the historical and geographical knowledge, which might be expected at upper secondary level, in relation to Britain and France. In the case of the processes and institutions of socialisation, there already exists evidence from the Durham project (Byram & Morgan et al. 1994) that a two-year course could be designed to introduce students to the main aspects of the socialisation process in another culture. At the same time, such a course would be designed to ensure that their awareness of their own culture was heightened. It remains to be seen from examination of the data collected, whether such knowledge is obtained through the present systems of teaching and learning at a particular stage.

It would be necessary to come to an agreement, in the case of upper secondary students as to the elements, which constituted general (historical/geographical) knowledge. It would essentially be knowledge, which could be gained from resources, used with younger children or the general public, rather than those used by their contemporaries in the upper secondary sector, for reasons of language difficulty. Questions relating to a syllabus for language courses will be discussed further in the concluding chapter.

There are some objectives in this category, notably the knowledge of the types of cause and process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins (c), which could be interpreted as being too sophisticated for the stage in question and more appropriate for later study. However, if the context and age of learners is made clear for the purposes of a particular examination, this would not necessarily constrain other forms of assessment for older learners (such as those studying at a similar level in the Open University). There would be a number of other important issues concerning teacher training, the production of materials, and the definition of criteria, if such changes were to be implemented at upper secondary

level. Byram's definitions of *savoirs* here are helpful in that they concentrate on knowledge required for social interaction. However, they need to be broken down into elements which could be reasonably attained by learners at various stages.

3.6.5 *Savoir comprendre, apprendre, faire.*

As in the case of *savoir-être* above, the French is clearer than the English 'skill' which the Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines as 'practical knowledge in combination with ability, cleverness, expertness, or a craft, an accomplishment'. It has already been seen, for example, that skills included in Section 4.7.1.2.1(p42) of the Common European Framework cover a wide range of activities which could hardly be termed 'intercultural'; thus making the task difficult for those wishing to incorporate intercultural competencies into the Framework. Here they will be discussed in separate sections

Savoir comprendre

In the light of remarks in the previous chapter about the importance of interpreting skills for the intercultural speaker, it seems likely that this element would fit well into any scheme for the assessment of intercultural competencies. Students could begin at a fairly simple level, using their cultural knowledge to explain documents, extracts from literature, reports, films and the spoken word in their own language and the target language as appropriate. They could be taught to identify ethnocentric perspectives, and later, to identify misunderstanding and dysfunction in order to mediate between interpretations. Their ability to do this would be accompanied by increasing knowledge about the target culture, which could be assessed together with linguistic competencies, or in a portfolio. Although Byram's definitions appear to be very demanding, as, for example in (c)

Ability to mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena

it would be possible to scale the demands of the tasks to the level of the learner, and choose an example which could be expected to come within the experience of the learner. This aspect is to be explored during data collection.



Savoir apprendre

The acquisition of new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices, and the ability to operate knowledge attitudes and skills under the constraints of real time communication and interaction, are the most radical and potentially the most fruitful of new approaches proposed by Byram and others. Ethnographic enquiry techniques can be taught to teachers and can, in turn be taught and practised by their students, in the context of an exchange visit or a holiday. Linguistic and intercultural elements combine in the appropriate environment for those who are able to travel; for those who cannot visit the country, techniques can be practised through electronic communication, such as the videoconference, or with local native speakers. Although Byram's definitions seem sophisticated for the upper secondary student, the context could be clearly defined to be appropriate to the age and experience of the majority of learners at this level. Only objective (e), the ability to identify contemporary and past relationships between one's own and the other culture and society is likely to prove more appropriate at undergraduate level. It does not seem possible to explore the potential of participants in this project as far as *savoir apprendre* is concerned, as this component would have to be taught. It was, however, taught in a limited way, with some success during the Durham project (Byram and Morgan et al.1994)

Savoir faire

Here Byram's definitions would lead us to assume that 'operation in real time' was necessary for the collection of evidence for this skill. With this proviso, some aspects of the definition would appear to be beyond the capacities of upper secondary students. Evidence from the work of Meyer, mentioned in section 2.3.1 (1991) with students of this age confirms that mediation, in the fullest sense of the term, is a very difficult skill. However, it is not, in itself, a difficult concept. It seems likely that, provided that situations requiring mediation were not beyond the experience, real or imagined, of the individual, then the activity could be discussed and practised in the classroom and elsewhere. If the task also involved interpreting, then two aspects could be controlled at the same time.

New approaches by such bodies as the Open University, might offer useful examples here, as there is an established practice of conducting group oral examinations. As Byram points out,(op.cit:104) it is important to devise techniques where there is little room for disagreement among assessors. Criterion referenced performance assessment might be used for intercultural skills and more traditional scaling in a 'presentation phase' (as in the case of Open University examinations) for the linguistic skills of candidates.

In the case of this research project, where linguistic skills are not assessed, participants will be asked what they would do in circumstances which would lead to mediation in order to solve a problem. The purpose is to discover whether language learners would be disposed to engage in such an activity, would be able to compare two cultures in order to understand where the difficulty had arisen, and offer a solution which would be acceptable to two sides.

An individual with poor intercultural skills in this context would probably offer sympathy to a visitor in difficulty in the target culture, whereas another might offer information, analysis of the problem and advice which would contribute towards a solution. There will be further discussion at the conclusion of this thesis on the subject of assessing this *savoir*, both in the traditional manner and in the portfolio system.

3.6.6. *Savoir s'engager*

Byram defines this *savoir* as being an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries. Given the fact that upper secondary language learners have long been expected to evaluate literary texts critically on the basis of explicit criteria, is it likely that such skills could be transferable to 'perspectives, practices and products'?

It seems possible that upper secondary students could be taught to evaluate, compare and judge. They are already expected to express and defend their own opinions in oral and written work at this stage. Personal experience of examining raises some doubts as to whether weaker students would not resort to stereotyped ideas and facile

judgements on the basis of superficial reading of their evidence. As Byram points out, the existence of this *savoir* is dependent on the successful exercise of others. It would be a difficult element, which would entail extensive teacher training were it to be incorporated into a specific scheme. Evidence might arise spontaneously in some individuals in the context (for example) of identifying values. Therefore, in data collection, participants will be encouraged to reflect and express opinions, so that more evidence can be obtained.

3.7 Summary and Conclusion to this Chapter

Following a survey of literature, which allowed a general theory of intercultural learning to be developed in the previous chapter, this chapter has concentrated on various approaches to the assessment of such learning. It is not, of course, possible to undertake reliable assessments of competencies, which have not been taught, using normal processes. This is a fact, which is acknowledged at every stage of the thesis. However, the only way to discover whether intercultural competencies are to be found in students, is to attempt to define and to judge the present situation. The collection of evidence must be carried out as carefully as possible. Such evidence must be subject to the methods of scrutiny, which exist in the academic community. It is for this reason that definitions were sought, against which the evidence could, as far as possible, be measured. It was also evident that the definitions ought to be applicable to a particular context. It is for this reason that it was decided to survey a number of institutions where there were students of Advanced Level French.

It was also decided to use the concept of *savoirs*, as defined in Byram (1997b) for two main reasons. In the first place, the experience of participating in the earlier (1994) Durham project influenced much prior thinking on the subject. The earlier work provided a foundation for the planning and execution of the project. The later work offered some further refinements of the concepts involved and therefore provided a coherent structure. The CEF would have been the preferred choice, as it had been prepared in a European context. If it were possible to design a methodology based on such a framework, then the implications of the results of

data collection might have a wider impact. However, for the reasons explained above, such a choice proved to be impracticable.

It was by no means possible to use all of Byram's objectives in the data collection process, as will be clear from the following chapter. In nearly every case the concepts had to be adjusted to be suitable to the learning experiences and cognitive development of the participants. In this process many elements had to be omitted or changed and the balance is therefore different. The fact that Byram's definitions are rather abstract is both a strength and weakness in the work. The amount of knowledge and experience of the home and target culture, which is implied in some definitions, could normally only be achieved by the mature, experienced and well-educated adult. In terms of the needs of governments and other organisations, however, such individuals would be very valuable, and it is useful to have an overarching system to define their competencies. At this point it seems that, although it cannot be applied directly to the needs of the upper secondary sector, it can at least offer a framework for data collection. This framework will be explained in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology and Fieldwork

Introduction

In the previous chapters, literature relating to the concepts of culture, cultural awareness and intercultural competence has been reviewed, together with possible frameworks for the collection of data from upper secondary learners of French. The final choice lay with the definitions proposed by Byram (1997b) and the final section of this chapter demonstrates how certain of the *savoirs* are operationalised in order to discover the existence of students' competencies.

The first section of this chapter examines the research problems in detail and proposes a suitable question upon which to build the research project. This is followed by a discussion on the problems posed by the nature of the study and the methodologies which might offer suitable solutions. There will be a justification for the qualitative approaches which were chosen, with references to the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), Patton (1990), Cohen and Manion (1994) and Maykut and Moorhouse (1994) and Mertens (1998). The researcher's view of the world, the nature of the research questions and practical reasons for the choices made will be examined more closely.

In the third section the project design will be described in more detail. The implementation of the fieldwork will be shown in tabulated form. An outline of the project, its pilot stage and the design of the initial questionnaire will be described. This will be followed by a summary of the three semi-structured interviews carried out over a period of eighteen months with students from the five participating institutions. In addition there will be reference to the interviews carried out with some of the teachers whose students were involved.

In the fourth section the strengths and weaknesses of the project design will be examined. The definitions proposed by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), Lincoln

and Guba (1985), and Kirk and Miller (1986) will be used to evaluate the quality of the research methods chosen in terms of their validity and reliability.

Finally, there will be a detailed description of the way in which the *savoirs* as described by Byram are operationalised within the framework of the semi-structured interviews and the accompanying activities. At the beginning of the following chapter there will follow an analysis of the data which is uncovered, followed by a critical assessment.

4.1 The Research Problems

It is clear from an examination of the literature that the cultural dimension of foreign language learning is an area which has been neglected in the past and is now a subject of concern to educators, teachers and learners, as well as to the wider public. The acquisition of intercultural competencies together with linguistic skills should enable individuals to become reflexive, to understand better their own cultural and political systems, as well as to gain a unique insight into 'otherness' from an alternative perspective, that of the 'third place'. Therefore one of the explicit aims of foreign language teaching in this sector should be to develop intercultural competencies, both in the interests of the individual and in the wider interests of international understanding, peace, tolerance and the acceptance of otherness.

Educators who are engaged in the teaching of foreign languages at universities, such as Kramersch, in training future foreign language teachers, such as Byram, Morgan, and Zarate, among others, have defined these intercultural competencies more clearly than has been the case in the past, and have also suggested some ways in which student progress might be measured. There has also been research linked to exchange visits and study abroad (not documented in this thesis), and a curriculum development project in the School of Education in the University of Durham.

Nevertheless, the upper secondary sector of the English educational system still presents some problems for those who would seek to integrate intercultural competencies into a foreign language learning programme. The emphasis both in classroom teaching and

examining is still dominated by the concepts of four linguistic skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing on the one hand and model of the educated native speaker on the other. Thus, students conceive of their task as a progression towards a goal, which some might regard as unattainable. Although they also study literary texts and/or specific topics, which probably give them insights into the target culture, we do not know whether such learning contributes to their understanding, or whether they acquire any other intercultural competencies as a result of their learning inside or outside the classroom. In addition, the new knowledge specification offered in Advanced level foreign language examinations is not defined in such a way as to offer clear guidance to teachers, learners and assessors, as was explained in Section 2.1.4.

At present there is no system in place to enable judgments to be made in regard to intercultural competencies, or indeed the progress which students might make in this area. As was stated in Chapters 1 and 2, the language level at the end of the course is supposed to equip learners to live and work in the target language country. Therefore they should have the opportunity, within the limits of their maturity and linguistic ability, to acquire some or all of the competencies, defined by Byram (1997b) as *savoirs*.

4.1.1 The Research Question

There is a widespread assumption that students who follow language courses will, as a matter of course, acquire appropriate skills and knowledge (intercultural competencies). In part, this assumption seems to stem from the fact that a substantial amount of the material they encounter is 'authentic', rather than from clear definitions of such competencies in examination syllabuses. As research literature indicates, the question of acquiring intercultural competencies is a far more complex and delicate process than that of studying authentic material. Therefore it would seem appropriate to engage in some research in the field in order to discover what intercultural competencies are actually acquired during this two-year period of study, and whether they correspond to those defined in the literature as *savoirs*. The research question is therefore an attempt to discover

Whether, during a two-year Advanced Level French course, following GCSE, students acquire intercultural communicative competencies which are commensurate with their linguistic level.

It is unlikely, for the reasons outlined above, and explained more fully in Chapter 2, that the *savoirs* as defined by Byram will be taught systematically to upper secondary students of French. However, there may be some aspects which teachers include for their own reasons, or which students learn as a concomitant of their studies or other contacts. There may also be progression which is in line with their maturity, their contact with France or with their linguistic skills. A longitudinal research project which seeks to examine students' learning experiences in depth will, it is hoped, furnish some answers to the above question.

4.2 Fieldwork Design – Quantitative or Qualitative Approaches?

The first problem to be faced by the researcher is that of choosing a methodological approach or approaches, which will be appropriate for the task. Patton distinguishes between the advantages of quantitative and qualitative approaches by contrasting the advantages and disadvantages of both

Qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth and openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry. Quantitative methods, on the other hand, require the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can fit into a limited number of predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned. (1990:13-4)

If the research problem concerned linguistic progress during a two year course, then it might be appropriate to devise measuring instruments and then, perhaps, to compare linguistic skills on a given continuum between various students, according to given criteria. Definitions of progress against the requirements of the course could be produced. Tests could be administered and results measured against criteria already in place. A design which was carefully prepared and implemented, ought to satisfy the requirements of the quantitative paradigm. These are internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity. However, the search for intercultural competencies will

require study in depth, with as much openness and detail as possible. Lincoln and Guba (1985:39-45), have offered alternative criteria to those which are used with quantitative research, that is credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Patton (1990) Kirk and Miller (1986), Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) on the other hand, reinterpret criteria of validity and reliability in order to guide the researcher. These issues will be discussed in relation to the methodology chosen towards the end of this chapter, and again following the process of data analysis, to be described in Chapter 5.

4.2.1 Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methods seem to be more appropriate for a number of reasons. In the first place the research is developmental and will entail a longitudinal study of a limited number of individuals. Cohen and Manion advise such an approach for descriptive research which seeks to identify typical patterns of development and to reveal factors operating on those samples which elude other research designs (1994:69).

In addition, Maykut and Moorhouse (1994) define eight characteristics of qualitative research in some detail and these definitions can be used to justify and further define this project.

- 1 *An exploratory and descriptive focus* Here the question is exploratory in that the aim is to discover which *savoirs* are being acquired. The outcome should be a deeper understanding of the perspectives of the participants.
- 2 *Emergent design.* To some extent it should be possible to pursue early discoveries by asking new questions. In the main, however, the design will be non-emergent, since the data will be collected and then analysed.
- 3 *A purposive sample.* Participants are selected for inclusion on the basis of their subject choice in upper secondary education. Variability is sought by the inclusion of a variety of schools serving different areas.

- 4 *Data collection in the natural setting.* Data collection here will take place in schools and colleges, where the students learn French. This approach fosters the development of both explicit and tacit knowledge.
- 5 *Emphasis on 'human as instrument'.* The researcher is both the collector and culler of meaning from the data.
- 6 *Qualitative methods of data collection.* Interview data is collected by the researcher in the form of field notes, documents and audio-taped interviews, later transcribed for use in data analysis.
- 7 *Early and ongoing inductive data analysis.* Data analysis is an ongoing research activity, which is primarily inductive. Although the final analysis takes place when all the data is collated, there is also analysis at each stage which will help to form the questions asked at the next interview.
- 8 *A case study approach to reporting research outcomes.* Enough description is provided to determine whether the findings apply to other findings or settings.
(adapted from Maykut and Moorhouse 1994:43-9)

The decision to use qualitative methods was confirmed by advice offered by Mertens (1998), which is more closely focused on educational matters than that of Maykut and Moorehouse (1994). In her introduction she suggests that to guide their thinking and their practice, researchers should identify a paradigm which most closely approximates to their own world view. A summary of current thinking and beliefs associated with the main paradigms is provided and examples are given from recent studies Mertens (1998:7-8). She suggests that the first (positivism/postpositivism) is based on the assumption that the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world and is generally associated with quantitative methodologies. The third (emancipatory) emphasises the fact that beliefs will be shaped by specific values which are often regarded as minority (linked to ethnicity or gender) and that the link between the researcher and participants is interactive. The second definition

(interpretive/constructivist) concerns multiple, socially constructed realities and primarily qualitative research methods and seems the most suitable of the three for the research design for both personal and practical reasons. Mertens also suggests that if researchers agree with the ontological assumption associated with the interpretive/constructivist paradigm that multiple realities exist that are time and context dependent, then they will choose to carry out the study using qualitative methods so that they can gain an understanding held by people in that context (1998:161).

4.2.2 The Researcher's View of the World

In terms of the present study, my own view of the world, influenced as it is by personal experience of acquiring intercultural competencies contingent with the learning and teaching of three foreign languages, relies on the ontological assumption that multiple realities exist and that these are dependent on time and context. Thus, insider experience of foreign cultures and of learning foreign languages, together with observation of learners has led to a particular world view.

As a teacher, traveller and organizer of exchange visits for students I have been through the process of moving back and forth between two (and more) cultures. In the process, I have become aware that the reality many of my fellow citizens regard as 'natural' is for them a culture, dependant on a number of factors, principally time and space. Target cultures, to which I have been able to gain access as an insider, while observing as an outsider, present an alternative reality, which is not necessarily that of my fellow citizens, but not that of a native either. This experience enables me to guide students through such multiple perspectives as well as to conduct research which is informed by a personal view. References in the literature to Thirdness and the Third Place, already examined in Chapter 2, provide a theoretical underpinning to this experiential knowledge.

4.2.3 The Nature of the Research Questions

In addition to the definitions of qualitative research offered above by Maykut and Morehouse (1994), Patton defines a number of research questions for which qualitative inquiry strategies are particularly powerful and appropriate (1990:92-107). These will be cited and then related in turn to the demands of the project..

1. The focus of the research is on the process implementation or development of a programme or its participants. The open-ended approach associated with qualitative methods 'permits the strengths and weaknesses to emerge from the process observations and interviews rather than from the theories and expectations of the researcher' (ibid:96). The programme in this instance is a programme of studies, lasting two years, which is studied through the participants and their teachers. Although there is prior theoretical knowledge, the data emerges from the interviews with individuals.

2. The programme emphasises individualised outcomes. Patton points out that a common activity for all students can result in drastically different outcomes for different students depending on how they approached the experience, what their unique needs were, and which part of the activity they found most stimulating. (ibid:98). In order to study the development of intercultural competencies it will be necessary to study a number of phenomena in terms of the individuals themselves.

3. Detailed, in depth information is needed about certain clients or programmes. Given the fact that intercultural competence can be defined as a complex mixture of knowledge, attitudes and skills, then it will be necessary to obtain detailed information about individual participants

4. The focus is on diversity among, idiosyncrasies of and unique qualities exhibited by individuals. 'Qualitative methods permit documentation of programme differences idiosyncrasies and uniqueness'(ibid:104). Within the limitations of a study, a

qualitative approach will tend to focus upon the diverse nature of the participants, their learning experiences in different institutions and in France itself.

5. The intent is to understand the programme theory. Patton says that qualitative research can help to distinguish between the official version of a programme and what really happens (ibid:107) This research is, in part, based on the fact that Advanced level French syllabuses make reference to the cultural dimension in their aims. It may help to establish whether these aims are, in fact, achieved.

4.2.4 Practical Reasons

There can be many reasons for adopting a qualitative methodology. In this case, qualitative methods are more appropriate for a project in which the researcher is, to some extent the instrument, has to gain access, negotiate entry and establish relationships of trust with participants in order to obtain data which is complex and which will vary with the individual participant. Although the data from the first stage, the questionnaire, will be analysed and quantified, the number of students involved in the semi-structured interviews is too small to warrant statistical analysis. A large scale study using quantitative methodology would not allow for the detailed observations necessary in this study.

4.3 Design and Chronology of the Research Project

A brief outline of the project is followed by an overview of each of the four stages of data collection. The progress of the fieldwork is then presented in a table and its implementation described. The strengths and weaknesses of the project design are then discussed, followed by a discussion of the criteria for evaluation. The final section describes in detail the operationalisation of the *savoirs* for data collection and analysis. A critical review of this section will appear in the following chapter, as this will enable both operationalisation and subsequent analysis to be examined together

After study of the literature, in Autumn 1995 there was a focus group discussion with a number of final year Advanced level students of French at the pilot school, in order to

gain their views. In February 1996 a pilot questionnaire was carried out at the same school, followed by minor adjustments to questionnaire design. In May 1996 the Questionnaire was administered in six schools. Then in Autumn 1996 pilot interviews were followed by the first round of semi-structured interviews. In the Summer of 1997 there were pilot, then second round and teacher interviews, followed by final rounds in Spring 1998. The details concerning the participants and the implementation of the fieldwork are to be found in the following tables.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Part 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

Date	Stage	Institution	Numbers
February 1996	Pilot Survey	Pilot School G	65
April 1996	Main Survey	School A	44
		School B	26
		School C	46
		School D	12
		School E	48
		School F	10

Note: Schools C, E, and F are 11-16 institutions. Schools A,B,D and G are 11-18 institutions

Pilot survey - total numbers 65

Main survey - total numbers 186

Part 2

Note: A,B, D and G offer upper secondary education. C transfers to H and E transfers to J. No pupils from F are followed into the upper secondary sector. School G provides two participants who act as pilot interviewees at every stage. Other students at G enter the main project for the three interviews.

INTERVIEWS

School Code	First (1996)	Second (1997)	Third (1998)	Teachers
A	3	2	2	2
B	1	-	-	-
D	5	3	2	1
G	4	4	4	2
H	1	1	1	-
J	1	1	1	2
Total	15	11	10	7

PROGRESS OF FIELDWORK 1995-1998

Date	Activity	Comment
Autumn 1995	Focus group meeting at the pilot school	Second year A level students discuss reasons for choosing French and their own learning experiences
Winter 1995	Initial contacts with five further schools	Permission sought to conduct a survey. All schools agree. Research and preparation of pilot questionnaire
February 1996	Pilot school survey	Questionnaire piloted and modified
Spring 1996	Six schools surveyed	Questionnaire administered to 186 languages pupils intending to follow Advanced level courses post-16
Summer 1996	Analysis of responses	SPSS package used to analyse data. Report written on the results
Autumn 1996	Four schools and two colleges contacted	Permission sought from headteacher and from students to continue study. 15 students agree to participate.
Autumn 1996	Visits to the above	Stage 1 interviews carried out with the participants.
Winter 1996/7	Interview transcription	Preliminary coding and analysis of data
Spring 1997	Report and further study	Preparation for Interview 2
Summer 1997	Recontact in order to arrange Interview 2 and teacher interviews.	Carry out interviews with 11 of the 15 original participants. Follow up with teacher interviews.
Autumn 1997	Interview transcription	Further analysis and report written
Winter 1997	Prepare final interviews	
Spring 1998	Recontact institutions	Final interviews with 10 participants and two students of other subjects
Summer 1998	Interview transcription	Analysis and preliminary report

4.4 Access to Institutions

Prior to undertaking this project, I had taught for 14 years in a local comprehensive school and five years in a Further Education College. Participation in a number of projects and activities connected with language learning in the region had led to acquaintance with a number of Heads of Modern Foreign Language Departments, who very kindly facilitated access to their institutions. The 11-18 comprehensive school G was particularly helpful, as it allowed pilot work and access at all stages.

Some balance between the location of the school and the likely socio-economic background of its students was evidently desirable, even though it would not, in itself, feature in the project. For example, to draw all participants from the city of Durham, which is largely inhabited by administrators and health and education professionals, would not have been at all typical of the north east of England. Accordingly, for the 1995/6 Questionnaire stage, the schools involved were a city comprehensive, a new town comprehensive, a small town comprehensive, a voluntary aided mixed (rural/urban) comprehensive, a rural comprehensive and a private sector school. Subsequently, problems arose due to the fact that not all schools have sixth forms. Four schools retained their students into the sixth form (years 12 and 13). In the case of the new town school, only one of the original group went to a local Further Education College. The others went to an institution which did not allow access. In the case of the small town comprehensive, only one of those who subsequently transferred to a sixth form college agreed to be interviewed. In the large town comprehensive there had been some problems in administering the questionnaire, which had resulted in a number of anomalies. In addition, since the first foreign language here had been German, none of the group had pursued the study of French into the nearby upper secondary institution.

At all stages the advice given by Cohen and Manion (1994:349) was followed, with regard to anonymity and confidentiality. Written permission for access was sought from institutions and individuals involved. At the first stage of the project, access was obtained by an informal request to the Head of Languages in the pilot school, followed by a formal letter to the Head Teacher. The same procedure was carried out in all the

participating schools. At the beginning of the Autumn term 1996 potential participants were traced and permission was again sought from the Head of Department, the Head teacher and all individuals concerned. Contact was then established with all 17 (two of whom were pilot participants), and interviews took place during that term, at the beginning of the first A level year. In the summer of 1997 the participants were re-contacted and all but four agreed to a second interview. It later transpired that two of the four had dropped French, including the one participant at the rural comprehensive. At this time too, seven of the teachers agreed to be interviewed. In the Spring of 1998 the participants were re-contacted for the third interview, and all but two agreed. At all interviews permission was sought to make audio recordings and confidentiality was assured. The intention to compare this group with others who had not studied French had to be abandoned, due to the fact that the only two who responded to the request for an interview had made efforts to continue their study of French independently and had close contacts in France.

4.4.1 Piloting the Project

A group of final year students of French agreed to have an informal discussion about their reasons for choosing to study French, their own experience and understanding of French culture, and various aspects of the French course which they considered to be significant. This focus group discussion provided information which contributed to the design of the questionnaire and the schedules for the semi structured interviews. The questionnaire was then designed and piloted at the same school. A number of minor alterations were then made to the questionnaire before it was administered to the other schools in the project. Subsequently, two students of French in the pilot school became the pilot participants. Interviews were carried out with them at the beginning of each stage, so that adjustments could be made if necessary.

4.4.2 Stage 1 - The Questionnaire (Appendix I)

At the outset, it was necessary to obtain some basic information about participants. In addition to factual information, a certain amount of data relating to reasons for subject choice in the upper secondary school is useful, in order to build up a picture of individuals and their reasons for studying French. As students have to choose only three subjects to study to Advanced Level, the factors involved in choosing French, the interplay between attraction towards French people and their way of life and other reasons for subject choice are evidently important. The first stage of the project therefore consisted of a questionnaire/attitude survey which was implemented among some 200 pre-16 (GCSE) students, studying languages and intending to proceed to Advanced Level studies (not necessarily in French).

In terms of data collection the questionnaire served a number of purposes. It was designed to provide student profiles with straightforward information relating to first subject choice, holidays and exchanges in other countries and other languages studied. In addition it allowed respondents to record their attitudes to a number of different aspects of language learning. It provided a number of reference points for the first interview, six months later and for the final review at the third interview. Although it is possible to seek such information during one-to-one interviews, a questionnaire, which is answered quickly on different aspects of a subject is likely to furnish more reliable results. Why should this be?

Experience of teaching students at this level distinguished two factors which would be likely to come into play and make it difficult to obtain unbiased responses. Firstly the subjects chosen at Advanced level have an important bearing on future study and career options. Having made a choice a student is likely to give favourable responses at the beginning of the course. Secondly, it would be difficult to admit that French had been chosen because other results had been disappointing. A survey conducted before the GCSE (pre-16) examinations, when many more options seem to be open, is likely to give a more reliable picture of the learner.

In preparation, research was carried out on questionnaire design, following the advice given by Oppenheimer (1966), and also Cohen and Manion (1994:83-105), in particular their advice on the self-completion questionnaire. It was also necessary to study the question of post-16 subject choices and motivation for foreign language study. Literature in the field for Advanced level option choice was not very plentiful. A 1996 NFER report (Sixth Form Options) devoted little space to the subject. It stated simply that choices were predictable, that the student liked the subject, had studied it before and would find it helpful in a future career. Stables and Stables (1995) researched gender differences in approach and perceptions of A level subjects in a survey of 209 first year A level students. Here, careers, interest, ability and advice from others were the factors cited.

Literature from elsewhere on the subject of motivation for foreign language study proved to be more fruitful, in particular the work of Gardner and Lambert (1972), Gardner (1985) and Dörnyei (1994). Gardner and Lambert proposed a construct of an integrative motivation, or identification with another ethnolinguistic group (French). They attempted to discover whether there were significant and independent relationships between attitudes and second language acquisition. Their hypothesis was that an integrative motivation would be stronger and more successful than one which offered instrumental, or pragmatic benefits. Their results showed that for American pupils this was likely to be the case, but that in some other parts of the world language learning was likely to be undertaken for instrumental purposes.

Gardner's later (1985) work refined and developed much of the earlier research, but was later criticized by Dörnyei because his construct did not include details on cognitive aspects of motivation, such as pleasure in achievement and perceived competence or the learning situation itself. Dörnyei also points out that the term attitude is used in social psychology and sociology where action is seen as a function of the social context and the interpersonal intergroup relational patterns. Motivation, on the other hand, focuses on the individual, with concepts such as instinct, drive, arousal and need.

That second language learning is a more complex process than simply mastering new information and knowledge, has long been recognized. Dörnyei's proposed construct involves a Language level with integrative and instrumental subsystems, a Learner level with components involving need for achievement and perceived competence, and a Learning situation level involving group social components. (1994a:280) A combination of Gardner and Lambert's and Dörnyei's constructs was adopted and simplified to suit the requirements of the study. The term 'orientation' proposed originally by Gardner (1985) was substituted for motivation as it seemed to capture the idea of 'direction' which more definite than attitude, yet weaker than motivation.

The first section of the questionnaire allowed for the collection of basic information, including possible subject choice and time spent in other countries. In the second section there was a battery of thirty statements designed to elicit orientations towards the foreign language, offering a five point Likert scale for the responses. Four orientations were distinguished. The first was affective, corresponding to Dörnyei's Learning Situation level, and associating language learning with pleasant social group activities. The second was cognitive, linked to Dörnyei's Learner level, where the need for achievement and perceived competence is satisfied. The third was 'instrumental', linked with Gardner's definitions concerning practical and career advantages. The fourth, and most important for the study is the 'integrative' orientation, where the student is interested in approaching the country, its people and their way of life, as proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972).

The question numbers were ordered as follows:

- 1 Affective orientation A (nos. 1,2,3,5,23,29)
- 2 Cognitive orientation B (nos. 8,10neg,14,15neg,19,22,24,26,28)
- 3 Instrumental orientation C (nos. 4,6,11,18,30)
- 4 Integrative orientation D (nos.7neg,9,12,13,16,17neg,21,25,27neg)

The final section of the questionnaire lists thirty possible topic areas for study in relation to a foreign culture. The majority of these correspond to those offered in course books

and examination syllabuses and some were suggested by students in the pilot school. The list allowed all respondents who were considering the possibility of further foreign language study to express their own opinions about topics which they think would offer them the best insights into the target culture. At the final interview, two years later, those who took part in the subsequent longitudinal study revisited the list and identified ten topics which, in hindsight, might have fulfilled this function. In this way their choices could be compared at the beginning and the end of the study.

4.4.3 The Semi-Structured Interviews

These interviews were carried out on a one-to-one basis with the participants in the institutions, usually in an interview room. The first round took place in the Autumn term of the first year of upper secondary study (1996), the second in the following summer (1997) and the third in the Spring of 1998, just before the Advanced level examinations. The interviews were open-ended at the outset, in order to put the participants at their ease and allow them to discuss their course. They were then structured in order to operationalise the *savoirs* defined by Byram (Section 3.6.1), adapting the concepts to the maturity of the participants. At each interview there were also activities involving the use of documents or pencil and paper, which are explained in detail below and shown in **Appendices II, III**

The conduct of the interviews was guided by the advice offered by Patton (1990:277-359). As well as guiding the conversation in order to enable participants to demonstrate *savoirs*, the interviews had to arouse the enthusiasm and interest of the participants. They also allowed them to reflect upon their experiences of learning about France inside and outside the classroom. Although the tasks did not require the use of French they were not easy and required some thought and analysis. In the following three sections the interviews are summarized briefly and in the final section of this chapter, the operationalisation of Byram's *savoirs* is shown more clearly.

The First Interview

In the first interview the participants were put at their ease and encouraged to discuss their reactions to the new course of studies. They checked and confirmed their responses to the questionnaire, in relation to questions designated as 'integrative'. They were then asked to say what they would find strange about living in France with a French family, going to school and socializing. They then discussed an imaginary French visitor to their home and things that he or she would find strange. They were encouraged to suggest a problem which might arise in the context of hosting a visitor and to describe how they would deal with it. A short text by Bryson, taken from Notes from a Small Island (1995) was then studied in order to pick out a number of references which might puzzle a French visitor. Participants were asked to underline and subsequently explain references which they judged to be difficult. Another short text by Mayle A Year in Provence (1989), set in France, was studied and references which might puzzle a British person with no knowledge of France were explained. In an exercise adapted from Cain (1990), the participants were also asked to write down the first five words which came into their heads in relation to France, and then to French people. They were thanked for their help and asked to keep a note of the topics they would study during the year.

The Second Interview

At the beginning of the second interview each participant was encouraged to discuss the first year of the course and to reflect upon what they had found out about France through work on topics and texts. Participants were then asked to define two or three things, which were typically British, and to imagine how French people might view them. Five historical figures or events were then mentioned, which concerned both Britain and France and participants were asked to comment on how each country might view them. Following a personal definition of their own (North East) boundaries, they were asked to say how a French person might think of British regions and then how they would divide France up into regions. To introduce the concept of social distinctions, participants were

first asked how young British people showed that they belonged to a particular group. Subsequently they were asked to comment on the way people might distinguish themselves from other groups in Britain and then about French people in France. They were also asked to give advice to a friend about coping with French greeting customs, notably kissing on both cheeks. The final task was a pencil and paper exercise in which participants give French and English cultural connotations to a list of common words.

The Third Interview

As with the second interview there was some general discussion on progress during the year and knowledge about France gained through the topics and texts. The topic list from the questionnaire was revisited and ten topics were chosen for their relevance to an understanding of the French way of life. The five words exercise from the first interview was repeated. Participants were then asked to explain any difficult references from a D.H. Lawrence extract from Sons and Lovers (1913) to a French person and then do the same thing with a translated piece of French text from Je Suis une Truie qui Doute by Claude Duneton, (1975) (**Appendix III**), for a British person. Finally the participants were handed a scenario presenting a hypothetical situation where they would be required to explain the difficulties experienced by a British student in France and mediate between different interpretations of the situation.

4.4 The Teacher Interviews - Triangulation

In addition, seven out of the nine teachers involved in teaching these groups agreed to one in-depth interview each. The questions in the interview dealt with the teachers' own definition of culture in the first place. Values and attitudes associated with language learning, the question of stereotyping, and values specific to French culture were then discussed and teachers were asked whether it was possible, in their opinion, to influence the attitudes of their students. They were also asked to comment on the relevance and importance of certain topics and their reasons for choosing them. The study of literature was also discussed in this context. Finally, all teachers were asked whether, in their opinion, it would be possible to teach the skills of mediation. These interviews were

free-ranging and offered the possibility of alternative perspectives and additional sources of information, that is to say triangulation, recommended by Patton (1990:187-9 244-6).

The influence of the teacher as a cultural intermediary both inside and outside the classroom is particularly significant for the upper secondary student. One or two teachers are responsible for rapid linguistic progress, have extended contact time, and few constraints on the choice of topics and texts to be studied. It was hoped to link evidence of competencies revealed by the participants with statements from the teachers themselves with regard to the topics they chose, the literary texts and the classroom methodology.

4.5. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project Design

The most important problem associated with the design of the study was the fact that both participants and teachers were engaged in a very demanding programme of study, in which the outcomes were highly significant for the future of the individuals and the reputation of the institution. The focus of all concerned was on the explicit linguistic requirements of the examination. The information sought for the purposes of research could not be readily associated with these requirements. It was evident that most of the questions and assessment activities were new to the participants. If they had had more time to reflect, their answers might have been better developed or even different. However, given the fact that they were only available for the two year period, it was not possible to revisit and expand on some subjects as much as I would have liked. In addition, it was impossible to compare the participants with a group who had not studied an Advanced Level French course, for reasons already explained above.

As already stated, small-scale research lends itself particularly well to qualitative methods. A single researcher, working without funding, is necessarily limited to a particular region and a relatively small number of participants. A project on a larger scale, involving another region might have offered more significant findings. However, if one person designs and implements a qualitative project there is a greater likelihood of

consistency in terms of the concepts to be explored with participants. This fact is particularly important at the point when the data are interpreted.

4.5.1 Ethical Considerations

Although the participants did not perceive the research as having a direct bearing on their examination success, it did offer them some advantages. They took on the role of informants, using their native language to describe their experiences and offer their opinions to a sympathetic outsider. Although there were a number of informal assessment tasks, these were designed to arouse interest and to allow individuals to present their own point of view, rather than to put them in a test situation. The questionnaire and interviews allowed participants to reflect upon other learning experiences than the purely linguistic and in this way offered them benefits which compensated for the time and effort they donated. This fact, together with the care which was taken to respect confidentiality at all times, was necessary in order to respect all ethical considerations.

As can be seen from the Table in Section 4.3 of this chapter, the project only concerned five different institutions. Nevertheless, it was possible to find variety in terms of the type of institution and the socio-economic background of the participants. Although these differences did not feature in the project, the fact that similarities were evident across institutions, contributed to the value of the study. The contribution of this project to the total of knowledge in the field may be small. However, given the fact that the need for intercultural competencies is openly acknowledged, it will be useful to implement any future changes in pedagogy or assessment, on the basis of as much empirical knowledge about the present situation as possible. In the following sections the questionnaire and the interviews will be evaluated separately

4.5.2. Evaluation of the Questionnaire

The design and implementation of this preliminary stage of the fieldwork did not link directly with other forms of data collection. The latter were more closely based on Byram's (1997b) definitions of intercultural competencies and were designed to elicit

specific information. The questionnaire at the beginning of the study was designed in order to explore attitudes related to the 'integrative motivation', proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972), and developed by Dörnyei (1994) and the notion of empathy towards a foreign culture. It also offered the possibility of collecting other useful information in a straightforward manner and providing a background for the semi-structured interviews

The third section of the questionnaire, which dealt with the topics studied in upper secondary French classes was also a useful focus for an aspect of the study. At the present time, course books, supplementary materials, even grammar exercises are virtually all 'topic based'. In some instances the topic in question examines a particular aspect of French society; in others the scope is more general. Observation and anecdotal evidence seemed to indicate that topics are usually chosen in order to arouse interest in current affairs, motivate the students to communicate and to express ideas and opinions. A 'topic section' in the questionnaire allowed prospective students to make their own choices. Even though it might be difficult for the pre-GCSE students to distinguish between a topic which might interest them and something which would give an insight into French people and their way of life, it was useful to focus their thoughts. It was valuable for the purposes of the study to allow the participants to review the 30 topic list at the end of their Advanced level course. They could compare the topics they had studied with other possibilities and reflect upon whether or not they had gained insights into French culture.

One weakness of the questionnaire lies in the fact that, although it was carefully designed and piloted, it was administered to a large group of students, who were not subsequently followed in the study. Thus, the time and effort spent on this aspect of the research might be difficult to justify. However, even if the importance of the results did not justify the amount of time and energy dispensed, the design and implementation of a questionnaire was a valuable experience, both in its theoretical and practical aspects

4.5.3. Evaluation of the Semi-Structured Interviews

In September 1996, only 15 students (plus two for the purposes of pilot interviews) could be traced for the longitudinal study. It might have been preferable to obtain a larger sample or to make a more detailed study. However, the first option was impossible due to the changes in institutions between lower and upper secondary sectors and the second option would have been both intrusive for students, who were engaged on a very intensive course of study, and self-defeating in that teachers and students would have become more conscious of the cultural dimension. The purpose of the study was to examine as many normal learning situations as possible

Given the age difference and the possible perception of power distance between the researcher and participants, there was always the possibility that participants would monitor the information they gave in order to present themselves in the best light. Given the nature of the research, it is possible that negative views were withheld. Those who criticised their course for its lack of coherence in presenting French culture might have been flattering their researcher. In order to counter this every effort was made to maintain a relaxed atmosphere and to make it clear that the study had nothing to do with foreign language skills, which might be examined. On some occasions it was necessary to elicit knowledge but it was always clear that the knowledge was not required for an exam. It was particularly important that participants did not feel that they had failed a test for which they were unable to prepare

4.5.4. Evaluation of the Teacher Interviews

At a number of points during the interviews it was possible to link statements made by teachers with data from the participants. However, the interviews proved to be difficult to manage, as the teachers were largely concerned with the demands of the examination and their own accountability within their institutions. As they were already former colleagues or acquaintances, the interview tended to be used as a vehicle for their own requirements rather than those of the project. They were less successful than they might have been if the researcher had been a total stranger. Nevertheless, there were

interesting data supplied with regard to the teachers' own views on cultural learning and also specific instances of practices, which could lead to successful teaching of intercultural competencies, and these will be pointed out in the following chapter.

4.5.5 Validity and Reliability of the Methodology and Fieldwork

Questions of validity and reliability were considered at all stages of the research project and will be discussed here in relation to the methodology and fieldwork and at the end of Chapter 5 in connection with data analysis. Some of the advice offered to novice researchers can be misleading, as it is based on the experience of working with groups which are relatively easy to access. For example Delamont states that 'as long as qualitative researchers are reflexive and make their processes explicit, then issues of reliability and validity are served. (1992). The problem here is to know how much explanation and reflexivity will be required for the conclusions to be credible. For the same reasons, it was not possible to adopt approaches which entailed generating theory from the data. It is only possible to engage in long, detailed and open-ended discussions with people who have plenty of time to spare and are readily available. In this project it was necessary to write letters, to make appointments and to keep to a strict timetable, as participants were using free lessons or lunch-breaks to attend for interview. Thus, the semi-structured interview, based on theories relating to intercultural competencies which had already been developed proved to be the best compromise.

Although the main part of the research study was conducted through the medium of semi-structured interviews, it was also important to conduct the questionnaire in such a way as to obtain reliable responses. I was able to gain access to schools in all but one case and to ensure that all relevant students answered the questions in a classroom setting, within a limited time-span and without consulting each other. Thus, I was able to ensure a standardised procedure and there was no problem of non-return of questionnaires. The fact that anomalies arose in the one institution which insisted that classroom teachers administered the questionnaires was a justification for this approach.

As far as the interviews were concerned, the advice of Kirk and Miller (1986) offered some useful insights into the problems which were likely to arise. They define validity and reliability as being two components of objectivity, which is both outside in the world we are describing and inside our heads. While carrying out fieldwork it was necessary to try to ensure that the data were not biased in terms of my own characteristics, the responses of the participants or the content of the questions. This was a particularly sensitive issue in terms of the competencies being studied. On the one hand there was the reality of intercultural competencies as I understood them, on the other there was the reality of French as subject to the participants, who would probably understand their competencies in terms of their achievements in the classroom or in an examination. It is important to represent reality as it appears to participants at the same time as it appears in theoretical and personal conceptions of intercultural competencies and every effort was made to do this.

4.6 Alternative Criteria

For Lincoln and Guba, the four terms credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are the naturalist's equivalents for the conventional terms internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity (1985:300). As an alternative approach to the general question of establishing trustworthiness, (to use their term), in the methodology chosen, these terms will be used for a final analysis in this section.

4.6.1 Credibility

What are the factors which might cast doubt on the credibility of the methodology and data collection? Firstly there might be distortions which were due to my own preconceptions. I might have used the interviews simply to confirm the opinion that intercultural competencies would not be present, because they did not appear upon the syllabus and because I had made a number of changes in my own pedagogical practices when I had been trained for in the curriculum development project described in Byram, Morgan et al (1994). I was also aware of the content of current text books and other materials used by colleagues. On the other hand, I was eager to find evidence of such

competencies, as experience would lead me to think that change is best effected when people are encouraged to build on aspects of their current practice.

Distortions can also arise when participants try to be helpful and provide information which they think the researcher is thinking. This is particularly likely to arise when there is a power difference in a school setting. There were several instances where participants were critical of their courses, expressing the view that the work was superficial or that the course was not designed to teach them about France. When these views are quoted they need to have the caveat that they might not be completely credible for this reason.

There is much emphasis in the literature on the importance of employing well trained and experienced researchers. My own experience as a volunteer for the Samaritans (1985-89), in conducting ethnographic interviews for the purposes of the curriculum development project (1991-2) and also for a Lingua project (1993) was extremely valuable in this respect. With such experience a researcher is able to listen carefully and ask relevant and meaningful questions, while remaining objective. The two-year life span of the project also ensured the prolonged engagement recommended by Lincoln and Guba (op.cit:301). However, a balance had to be kept between the ideal situation, which would have been more extended contact with groups, including classroom observation and the fact that 'cultural elements' might have been included simply because there was a researcher present. Thus the purpose of studying a normal situation would have been lost. A certain amount of triangulation in terms of the teacher interviews was also present (ibid:305) Although not all data collected were particularly useful to the research, the impression was gained that the participants were giving natural, spontaneous responses and that, therefore, the data were reasonably credible.

4.6.2 Transferability

Lincoln and Guba advise that

The naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone

interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility. (op.cit.:316).

Is it possible to say that transferability and replication are impossible, as qualitative research is only designed to give detailed information about a particular set of circumstances? Researchers in the field of education are rarely asked to make a study of something which could not be replicated in another school. For this reason the question will be considered, although few claims can be made for research carried out by a novice.

There were only a small number of participants in the study, as French is not a popular subject and I was not able to gain entrance to as many institutions as I would have wished. The group was located in the north-east of England, rather than the south, which might have accounted for a lack of contact with the target culture. However, almost all of them had taken part in a visit or an exchange. Prior learning in the shape of the GCSE course followed up to the age of 16 by all pupils is broadly similar across the country. The five institutions chosen were also representative of others elsewhere in the country, being a city comprehensive, a rural/urban voluntary aided school, a further education college, a sixth form college and a private school. There were a mixture of males and females in the groups and some socio-economic variation can be assumed, although this is not to be taken into account in reporting results. The aim was to carry out the advice of Lincoln and Guba in terms of purposeful sampling (op.cit:40).

4.6.3 Dependability and Confirmability

If dependability is to be defined as the qualitative criterion, parallel to reliability over time, the question might be asked as to whether a similar study would reveal similar results at a later date. Would another researcher discover the same phenomena in similar settings? These are difficult questions to answer, as changes are largely driven by examination syllabuses or government directives, combined with retraining of teachers. Such changes have yet to take place in connection with intercultural competence. Inevitably, another researcher and another group of students would be operating in different settings. Results might be similar but it is impossible to guarantee this. Lincoln

and Guba prefer to link the concept with that of confirmability and stress the importance of a 'single audit, properly managed, (which) can be used to determine dependability and confirmability simultaneously' (op.cit:318) All data in this study can be tracked to its source in audio-cassette recordings and transcriptions. Changes of approach and decisions have been recorded and the design of the study has been examined for the influence of external effects, as advised by Lincoln and Guba, (1985) Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) and Patton (1990). An audit trail is available for inspection and every effort has been made to be both clear and transparent.

In the first part of this chapter the intention has been to give a general overview of the methodological considerations involved in the design and implementation of the research project. At each stage there has been an attempt to evaluate strengths and weakness and to explain the setting in as much detail as possible. The final section now offers a detailed framework for the operationalisation of theoretical concepts, based on the work of Byram (1997b)

4.7. The Search for Intercultural Competencies Operationalisation of Concepts

Byram's definitions (1997:57-64) offer a theoretical framework to guide practitioners in decisions related to teaching and assessing intercultural competencies up to the very highest level. The structure of the framework is built upon a number of *savoirs* (op.cit:34) and distinguishes clearly between the categories of knowledge, skills and attitudes. One approach to the operationalisation of the concepts set out in 3.6.1, would have been to take each one in sequence and relate it to questions in the semi-structured interviews or the informal assessment activities. The other approach would be to take each stage of the research project and indicate the way in which the concepts had been operationalised in context. In the end the latter option was chosen for reasons of coherence

In practice, whether in the classroom or in a research interview, language and culture learning cannot be easily separated into different concepts. This is made clear in Byram & Morgan (1994) and elsewhere and was the case in the project. *Savoir-être* can

be measured by survey but only in a limited and simple way. Self knowledge on the part of the learner and long-term observation on the part of others would be necessary in order to make accurate judgments. *Savoirs* present fewer problems in that they are more 'objective'. The problem in this context is to judge exactly what can be considered a suitable level of knowledge for a student who may have learnt French for transactional purposes and who may never have studied the country in history or geography lessons in the lower secondary school. Questions were designed on the basis of experience of students at this level, with the possibility that weaker participants would be able to discuss some aspects and the above average would be able to elaborate their answers and think more deeply.

In the semi-structured interviews, questions relating to *savoirs*, *savoir apprendre*, *savoir comprendre* and *savoir faire* tended to be explored together, in the sense that the skills which might be displayed depended on background knowledge of some aspect of French society. Without the underpinning of knowledge it was impossible to judge the level of skill which might have been present.

Finally, there was the problem of the maturity of the participants and the full definitions offered by Byram. In many cases the definition indicated the highest point of the competence. In order to judge the level of competence, which might be present in an upper secondary student, it was sometimes necessary to rephrase the definition or to use part of it. In all cases the attempt was made to remain faithful to the core of the definition concerned. Where a participant gave evidence of a particularly high or low level of competence or of competence relating to *savoir s'engager* this will be explained in the following chapter.

In the sections below all references to Byram's text (1997b) will appear in italic and the reference points will be maintained. Questions which were designed to operationalise concepts will be indented and numbered.

4.7.1. The Questionnaire *Savoir-être* Engaging with Otherness

Section 2 of the Questionnaire sought general information relating to attitudes to other cultures. Byram's objectives (a) and (b) were modified thus:

(a) willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness

(b) interest in discovering other perspectives on other cultures and cultural practices

(a) was operationalised by Questions 13, 16, 21 and 25, *(b)* by 12 and 16 (Appendix)

I could see myself eating and drinking in the traditions of the country

I could see myself married to a native and bringing up children

I would enjoy spending 6 months or more there as a student or worker

I could see myself becoming close friends with a native

I would watch subtitled TV from that country if I could

I try to find out extra things from books, papers and TV

4.7.2 The First Interview (Autumn 1996) *Savoirs, Savoir Comprendre*

4.7.2.1 *Savoirs*

(h) the processes and institutions of socialisation in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country

This concept was modified to make suitable for the maturity of the participants and operationalised by the following questions;

(1) If you were living with a French family, going to school and socialising, can you tell me what you would find strange about the experience? (assuming no language problems)

(2) If a French person was spending time over here in the same circumstances, what do you think he or she would find strange?

4.7.2.2. *Savoir Comprendre,*

(b) identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present

This concept was operationalised as follows:

(3) If your visitor was experiencing problems in a certain area (already identified by the participant or suggested by the interviewer), can you tell me how you would deal with it?

(a) identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins

(4) To operationalise this concept two short documents were chosen (**Appendix II**). One involved participants in identifying elements in a short text by Bryson (1995) (A) which would be difficult for a French person to understand in translation, because of cultural references. The second text, by Mayle (1996) (B) was written for a British audience, with a tourist knowledge of France and would need to be explained to a British person without such knowledge. Participants were asked to study the documents, underline words which would need further explanation, and subsequently give their own explanations.

4.7.3 Second Interview (Summer 1997) *Savoir-être, Savoirs, Savoir Comprendre*

The second interview, conducted after one year of study at Advanced level was designed to elicit further and more detailed information. At the beginning of the interview general questions were asked, which related to topics and texts being studied and the knowledge, which had been gained about France or French people. It was assumed that further study of French would have developed the *savoir-être* already defined to that of:

4.7.3.1 *(b) interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar phenomena in one's own culture and cultural practices.*

By narrowing the concept to Britishness and asking the participants to offer their own definitions and then to consider a French perspective on those definitions, it was felt that the concept could be operationalised at a level, which corresponded to the maturity of

the participants. It might also be possible to gauge attitude by judging the quality and fluency of the responses, but that is a issue to which we will return later.

(5) Can you think of two or three things which are typically British and then imagine how French people might view these typically British phenomena?

(6) There are a number of ideas we have about ourselves as 'the British' Can you think of a few and then tell me how a French person might regard them?

The questions designed at this stage related to Byram's definitions of *savoirs* as follows:

4.7.3.2 *(a) historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries*

(d) the national memory one one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries

(e) the national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries

In order to operationalise the concepts they were combined into one concept, that of a 'dual perspective' on a number of historical events common to the collective memory of both France and Britain. They were 1066 (Battle of Hastings) Joan of Arc, the French Revolution, Napoleon, and the Second World War. The question was:

(7) I am going to mention some historical events/people which concern both Britain and France and then I'm going to ask you how each country might view them?

4.7.3.3 Byram's definitions relating to national space, borders and frontiers

(f) the national definitions of geographical space in one's own country, and how these are perceived from the perspective of other countries

(g) the national definitions of geographical space in one's interlocutor's country and the perspective on them from one's own

were operationalised by asking the following questions:

(8) Could you define for me the boundaries of your own region?

(9) How would you divide up Britain from the point of view of a French person?

(10) How would you yourself divide France up into regions?

4.7.3.4 In addition, the question of *savoirs* relating to social distinctions, as described by Byram in

(f) social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's

was operationalised by the following questions:

(11) How do young British people show that they belong to a particular social group?

(12) If you are observing people in this country, can you tell what their background might be or what kind of job they might do?

(13) What about France? What kind of differences have you observed there?

4.7.3.5 *Savoir Faire (c) Identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances*

was operationalised during the interview by the following question:

(14) How would you advise a friend to behave in France when everyone seemed to be greeting each other with kisses on both cheeks?

4.7.3.6 *Savoir Comprendre* in document work was confined to a short written task in which participants were asked to

(a) identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins

(15) The following list of words was presented on a sheet of paper. The participants had to define the cultural connotations associated with the words in terms of a British or French context in order to operationalise the concept.

English	French
Café	Café
Coffee	Café
Family	Famille
Embrace	Embrasser
Terrace	Terrasse
Wednesday	Mercredi
Bread	Pain
Church	Église
Christmas	Noel

4.7.4 Third Interview (Spring 1998) *Savoir Comprendre, Savoir Faire*

The third series of interviews were conducted in the early summer of 1998, just before the Advanced Level written papers. As in the case of the first two interviews, general questions were asked which related to the topics and texts which had been studied and knowledge which had been gained about France, or French people. Participants were shown the topic list which they had filled in at the time of the original questionnaire and were asked to indicate the ten topics which they would now consider most important in order to understand French people and their way of life. They were also asked to write down five words concerning France and five concerning French people.

4.7.4.1 *Savoir Comprendre*

In order to discover whether the participants had made progress in the area of *savoir comprendre* the material they were given under

(a) *identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins*

was more complex and difficult than that which they had dealt with during the first interview (the second interview dealing with a slightly different aspect of the question) The first text was an extract from Sons and Lovers by D.H. Lawrence and the second the translation of an extract from Je Suis une Truie qui Doute by Claude Duneton (Appendix III). Both had autobiographical elements and were set in the provinces.

The English text had been written for a British audience and contained a number of references of a historical, geographical or social nature which would be difficult for a French native speaker to understand. The French text contained reference to the traditions of the education system and the power structures in France, which would be difficult for an English person to fully understand.

(16) As in the first interview participants were asked to study the documents, indicate areas of difficulty and give their own explanations if possible. The intention was to discover whether their maturity and the time they had spent in learning French had been accompanied by some progress in intercultural competencies.

4.7.4.2 *Savoir Faire*

In order to discover whether participants might be able to

(c) mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena

the following scenario was presented at the end of the interview

(16) This is a situation which you might come across when you are a student. Can you tell me what you would say to Mark

to explain why he has these problems
to suggest what he might do to improve matters

Mark is doing a Business Studies course at an English university and has come to a French provincial university on the Socrates scheme as part of an exchange system. The courses he follows are taught in English as part of a bilingual programme. He has GCSE French and has followed a refresher course. When talking to him you find out that he is depressed. He makes three specific complaints:

There is nobody around in his hall of residence at the weekend and in any case there don't seem to be any social events or social areas

There are no pubs!

He finds French people rude and uncaring. He thought they would be pleased to practise their English with him.

Responses would be analysed in the light of the definition and it was hoped to be able to differentiate between individuals.

Summary and Conclusion to this Chapter

In this chapter the methodology chosen for the longitudinal study has been explained and justified according to criteria established by theory and practice in the field of education in recent years. The qualitative approaches advised by Patton, Maykut and Moorhouse, Martens and Lincoln and Guba have been particularly helpful in framing a structure for the methodology. The chronology of the fieldwork has been set out and an overview of the project from start to finish has been provided. Finally the way in which Byram's *savoirs* were operationalised by the use of questions and informal assessment activities has been explained. The following chapter will move directly to a detailed analysis and discussion of the data collected over the two-year period. This will be followed by reflections upon the validity and reliability of this particular process and the results which were obtained after analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

Analysis of Data Obtained During Fieldwork

Introduction

In Chapter 4 the methodological approaches were explained and justified by reference to the literature in the field of qualitative research methodology. In this chapter there will be detailed analysis and discussion of the data collected during the two year period of the longitudinal study. The framework for this analysis will be based on definitions offered by Byram (1997b), as detailed at the end of Chapter 3 and set out in Chapter 4.

This chapter will be divided into five sections. The first four of these will be devoted to the analysis of data obtained during each of the four stages of the project. Where appropriate, a summary of the responses will be presented in a simple tabular form in order to give an overview of the results. The tabulation will be followed by comment and analysis, and quotations from individual participants. These will either illustrate responses, which were significant, because shared by the majority of the participants, or will indicate a particularly interesting point of view. The coding indicates the institution, the original questionnaire number, whether the speaker was male M or female F, and the interview number. In some instances an overview, giving the salient points will be more appropriate than a table. In the fifth section, there will be a summary and commentary on each of the four stages, together with additional information from the teacher interviews. This final section will include a critical review of the framework itself and the research process which resulted from its use.

5.1 Savoir être - Questionnaire Results and Stage 1 Interviews

The responses to questions concerning the integrative orientation were placed on the Lickert scale of 1-5, with 1 being the most positive (**Appendix I**). The final figure represents the percentage of all respondents who answered positively, that is to say, in categories 1 and 2. Thus, it is possible to compare the results of

those who opted to continue French with the larger group of their peers. There were six questions which sought information about the integrative orientations of lower secondary school students, prior to the point at which they would make the final decision to continue with their study of French. Four of these questions also fit Byram's concept of *savoir-être*.

5.1.1. (a) *willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness*

- Q 13 (eating and drinking in the traditions)
- Q16 (married to a native, bringing up children)
- Q 21 (spending 6 months or more as a student or worker)
- Q 25 (becoming close friends with a native)

Table 5.1 (186)	Participant Group (14)					All Respondents
	1	2	3	4	5	
Lickert Scales						1 + 2
Question 13	3	4	3	3	1	61.3%
Question 16	1	5	4	1	3	6.5%
Question 21	7	4	1	0	2	55.9%
Question 25	5	6	3	0	0	53.0%

How do the attitudes of the participant group compare with their peers?

With regard to food and drink (Question 13), it would seem that their attitudes do not differ widely from those of their peers. The increase in holiday travel and changes in eating habits in recent years have been particularly marked among young people, who are much less conservative in their eating habits, than their elders. Further data on the attitudes towards French food and mealtimes was obtained at the time of the first interview, in the context of living in a French family.

Those with practical experience of living in France, or visiting on holiday mentioned differences in presentation of food or length of mealtimes. One remarked that food was healthy and another on the fact that she had stayed with a family who had grown their own produce. Negative comments mainly concerned meat, the fact that it was undercooked or that French people ate horsemeat and

veal. In comparison with the positive attitudes of the whole group, the students of A level French showed some reservations on the subject of eating and drinking in the traditions of the target language country. This may have been on the basis of their greater knowledge and experience. It is perhaps significant that the only participant who had never been abroad reverted to the stereotype of French food:

Well, they have all these different snails and frogs' legs and that kind of thing, and all the different things. It's disgusting some of the food they have, so that would be different (B57F – 1)

There was a difference in the response to Question 16, which would imply a very close connection with France, between participants and their peers. This might have been peculiar to the group, but might also indicate an almost romantic enthusiasm for the idea of living in France among this particular group. It is difficult to say whether students who opt for French at this stage are influenced by affective considerations to a greater extent than, say those who choose History. Informal enquiry among the teachers revealed that, at the end of the two year period, students who had started the course with high scores on integrative and affective orientations were those who achieved the highest grades at the end. Only two participants scored low on integrative orientations and both of them had dropped the subject by the end of the year. In the Stage 1 interviews one of these appeared to be fairly hostile to French people, describing them as 'rude and inconsiderate' in the pencil and paper exercise. The other, quoted above, wrote 'hate the English', when describing French people. Other participants used positive words such as 'friendly', 'sociable', 'outgoing' and 'talkative' in the same exercise. It is quite possible that their general linguistic skills, which were self-rated as good in the questionnaire, would have influenced their other orientations, but this was not pursued in the research project. As Dörnyei points out, achievement and perceived competence are motivating factors as well as integration (1994a:208).

Question 21 was regarded as a key question because it corresponded with the definition of sojourner and confirmation of the participants' attitude was specifically checked at the point of the first interview, in order to confirm the earlier response. Since students are aware that the study of foreign languages is

likely to give opportunities for work or study in Europe, the results here are unsurprising. However, one of the participants (A31F) had an aunt who had experienced difficulties in settling in Italy and so was more cautious. The fact that more than half the total number of respondents were also attracted to the idea of studying or working in Europe, contrasts sharply with the small numbers of those who actually pursue their language studies into the upper secondary sector at the present time. Responses to Question 25 also seem to indicate the importance of affective and integrative orientations among those who choose to further their language studies, and are markedly higher than the responses from the whole group.

Answers to the two questions which can be connected with Byram's definition of *savoir-être*

5.1.2 (b) *interest in discovering other perspectives on one's own and other cultures and cultural practices*

were at this stage examined in the light of responses to Questions 12 and 20

- (12) I would watch subtitled TV from that country if I could
- (20) I try to find out extra things from books, papers and TV

Only 4 out of the 15 participants responded positively (Lickert 1 and 2) to these two questions, and 20.1% of the total number. The responses might have indicated a lack of interest in the media generally rather than an interest in other perspectives on the target culture. In addition, it must be remembered that the questionnaire was answered by students who were about to sit up to ten examinations, and would be unlikely to concentrate their efforts in a particular area by engaging in extra activity. For that reason, the answers to the questions were not considered to be a very reliable indication of the participants interest in the subject, compared to the more straightforward responses in (a).

It would seem that those who choose to further their language studies (as well as over 50% of those who intend to study something else at Advanced Level) do have attitudes of curiosity and openness and are willing to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness. At this stage, however, this general

interest does not seem to be matched by a specific desire to discover other cultural perspectives. It may well be the case that learners at this stage would find it difficult to access such information. Further discussion of these results, together with other aspects of *savoir être*, will be presented in Section 5.

5.2 The First Interview

These interviews took place in the Autumn term of the first year of the French course and were devised in the context of Byram's definitions of *savoirs* and *savoir comprendre*. As these were the first interviews, participants were all given time to discuss their first impressions of the course and any difficulties they might be having. They were also asked to note down the first five images which came into their heads in relation to France and then to French people, an associative technique used by Cain (1990). This activity would be repeated at the end of the course to discover whether there were any significant changes which might be attributable to their acquisition of intercultural competencies during the course. At this, and at every other interview, participants were also asked what information they had gained about France in the course of their studies.

5.2.1 *Savoirs* Knowledge about France

Byram's definitions (1997b:58) were modified to take account of knowledge which participants might have acquired at school or elsewhere. Thus for a young person

(h) the processes and institutions of socialisation in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country

were limited to the family, the school and the peer group with whom they spent their leisure time. In this way concepts of primary and secondary socialisation were expressed in terms of family, school and peer group. Knowledge about France in these contexts might have been obtained at first hand during an exchange visit, or at second hand from school where the topics of family, school and friendships are covered during the GCSE course, or from other sources, such as the media. The four participants who had taken part in an exchange will be considered separately from the others, as their experiences had been at first hand.

Question 1 If you were living with a French family, going to school and socialising, can you tell me what you would find strange or different about the experience?

5.2.1.1 Answer. (4 responses: exchange experience)

As far as family life was concerned the responses here were more realistic and detailed and less speculative than the others. They tended to concentrate on mealtimes and communication between members of the family.

In France you tend to have maybe a starter, maybe a smaller main meal than we would have here, then maybe dessert or cheese (G03F – 1)

They take years eating their food and they live more from what they've grown rather than from what they buy, from my experiences.

They take some time to relax more from my experience (A26F – 1)

It was a bit strange because they all sat down to eat at exactly the same time, which we never do (at home) (G04F – 1)

One participant who wrote regularly to her exchange partner had gained fairly detailed information about daily life in a *lycée* and was able to contrast her experience with that of French young people. The others had only limited information probably gained at school, as their exchange visit had taken place before the transfer to the *lycée*. If their visits had involved attendance at school, they seem not to have retained much information. At a later interview, however, it transpired that some of the participants studied the topic of education in France after this interview. Thus it can be assumed that they did have more detailed knowledge by the end of the course.

With regard to social life with the peer group, these participants were not able to point to marked differences, which they or their friends had encountered. As their exchanges had been in rural areas and had taken place at an age when social events were arranged for them, they had little detailed information on the social activities of people of their own age. However, as will be seen below in Section 5.2.2, they were better equipped than some of their peers when they were considering the impact of their own social life on outsiders.

5.2.1.2 (10 responses)

Those who had not taken part in an exchange had varied experiences of France. One had parents with a house in Normandy. Three had had several holiday visits. One had taken part in a study visit and three others had either very little, or no experience. It was noticeable that the last three had recourse to the concept of difference with remarkable frequency. In the case of participant (B57F), already cited above, the word was used 27 times in this section of the interview. Another, with no direct experience of staying in France, moved between the concept of different and not different, without being able to elaborate, due perhaps to her lack of knowledge and experience:

The times are different to that in England, the school times, traditions, what they do of a night.....

Do you think everyday life in the family would be different in any way?

Could be, but I don't think it would be totally different. It would be like England, really (G02F - 1)

As Zarate has observed:

Dans la confrontation avec l'altérité, les membres d'une communauté recherchent d'abord le plaisir des retrouvailles avec eux-mêmes, la permanence de leur vision du monde (Zarate 1986:24)

Thus, we should not be surprised that young people seek to balance their awareness of the fact that life in France must be different, with a need to feel that their own 'vision of the world', conditioned by their limited experiences, is in some way permanent. At present, differences between cultures are largely glossed over in foreign language course books destined for the lower secondary school. Therefore, those who undertake upper secondary courses, without the benefit of first hand experience of the culture, might be most likely to fit Zarate's description and assume that they would find everyday life similar to their own.

Another, perhaps a more socially confident individual, expressed a similar view in a more sophisticated manner. During his experience of walking holidays, he

said, he usually met other foreigners rather than French people. This common interest in walking drew them together. He also experienced this community of interest among fellow musicians, as his main field of study was music. This may have contributed towards his ability to move between the concepts of different and same on the assumption that he would continue to meet others who shared his interests:

They all seem to be the same sort of people that we are here just living in a different part of the world and speaking a different language. I think all people of our age are the same and I think if we are interested in the same things, we'd get on very well (D123M – 1)

As with the first group, eating habits and mealtimes were cited in the context of family life. It is interesting to note in this group that two references were made to family habits or behaviour in the context of leisure time. One had studied the topic of young people at the beginning of the year and gained the impression that:

the parents were very strict and didn't let them go to parties and things, were some of the comments they make, whereas ours didn't seem to be as strict as what their parents were (C110F – 1)

Another participant from another institution had studied the same topic and generalised his view from different source material.

The younger generation certainly seem to go out a lot more. I was reading about going to the cinemas, discos, whatever, and although it does happen here I don't think there is so much emphasis on it - and I'd even go so far as to say that I don't think a lot of spare time in this country is used to a great extent. The French always seem to be doing something (D124M – 1)

This apparent contradiction illustrates the point that learners will try to construct images of the culture for themselves from the information they receive. Pickering discusses this tendency and points out that the process can lead to bias and distortion and to the formation of over-generalisations and stereotypes (2001:28). In this particular instance, it is likely that the texts were chosen by teachers in order to stimulate communication on the topic among the students, rather than to encourage reflection on leisure activities of young French people.

Indeed two participants remarked that they considered that this was the main reason for the choice of texts and topics:

I think it's more concentrating on the grammar and the speaking rather than the French way of life. You cover topics that.....what young people do and things, but it's just to get you interested in the language. It's not to tell about the way French people live (D122M – 1)

The same phenomenon was observed in relation to school life. Where information had been obtained from lessons, there was evidence that details obtained from texts tended to be generalised by the learners, with the result that information from two or three sources conflicted. Thus it was noted by one participant that French pupils were rebellious, that they had an immature attitude towards teachers (like primary school) However, another student had gained the impression, from his studies that the French were more serious about their future careers than his friends, and noted that:

They don't seem to muck about as much as English children do (D122M – 1)

The examples above indicate that uncritical unstructured reading of documents relating to foreign culture does not help students to adapt their schemata in order to understand cultural differences. The work of Piaget, Vygotsky and Howard, examined in Sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 has made clear that it is difficult for the learner to appropriate new cultural meanings in a second language. Cultural knowledge about France in these instances seems to be fragmentary and is compared to their own experience in a somewhat haphazard manner. It is a clear illustration of the problem which teachers face in the language classroom, when dealing with the cultural content of their material, addressed in detail in Kramsch (1993) and discussed in Chapter 2. It seems that, where there is no particular requirement to deal with the context, and where the principles of communicative language teaching give primacy to speaking skills, the learners draw their own conclusions.

5.2.2 *Savoirs* Britain as Seen by French People

In order to discover whether participants were aware of how their own processes of socialisation might appear to a visitor from France, they were asked:

Question 2 If a French person was spending time over here in the same circumstances, what do you think he or she would find strange?

5.2.2.1 (4 responses: exchange visit)

As before, those who had practical experience of an exchange tended to make detailed references and discuss practical problems, which might concern food, adjusting to school life and social life with their peers. With regard to food and mealtimes they were more aware that difficulties might involve not only the nature of the food eaten, but the fact that meals in France were usually taken at a slower pace:

I think it would be a bit difficult for them with English food, because a lot of French people don't like baked beans and things like that, you know, everyday foods....families have got to work round that. (G05F - 1)

I mean, breakfast isn't a prolonged event. It's just, quick, grab some cereals and go out of the house (A26F - 1)

Having experienced a school environment at first hand, even if at an earlier stage, this group were more aware of the implications of wearing a school uniform:

The school system. They would find it difficult to adjust....they would have to wear uniform.....They would find it very strange (A26F - 1)

They would look really horrified if they had to wear uniform, so I don't think they would at all, no. (G04F - 1)

Another was aware that the habit of socialising in large groups might present problems for an outsider:

Probably the way we go out, because there is a big group of us all go out together, and I think for a person to come into that group it must be really hard (G05F - 1)

It was noticeable that this group stressed the need to adapt, to have an open mind, to make the best of difficult situations and negotiate compromises. One participant was aware that she might be confronted with very different attitudes and behaviours during an exchange and, in connection with exchange visits in general she said:

I'd have to get used to it. Maybe it would be difficult, but I suppose you'd make the most of it and learn to appreciate what you had in England

What sort of strategies do you think you would use to make the most of it, do you think?

Well, just to make sure that you're in an open frame of mind when you do go out, so that you're not closed to the idea and think 'Oh this is rubbish - I'm not going to enjoy myself at all' - Just have an open mind. (G03F - 1)

The above comments seem to point to the fact that this group had acquired and retained skills of interaction over the three years from the date of their exchange. It is not possible to say whether all pupils who take part in exchanges acquire such skills, as those who opt to continue the study of French are likely to have had relatively successful visits, and may have adapted well to this form of experiential learning.

5.2.2.2 (10 responses: non exchange group)

It was not surprising to discover that those, who had not acted as a host to a foreign visitor had more difficulty in envisaging problems and difficulties which might arise. There was a varied response, as some participants had experience of German or Canadian pupils in their school and used this as an example. Some others had retained impressions of French people in their own school and mentioned features of the visit, which had seemed important at the time, such as smoking during break times. It was interesting to note that religious belief and practices were attributed to French people by three participants and were seen as a problem in a non-religious society, their own.

I don't know if they are religious, if they are very religious, because if they were, then they would probably find that strange, because round

here, there's not very many people that are strongly religious. (C110F – 1)

It had been noted at one institution that the German students found it difficult to understand jokes and sarcasm. It was assumed that French students would encounter the same problems. This group generally showed openness and goodwill towards hypothetical foreign visitors, but would, it seemed, be less likely to demonstrate specific skills to deal with any problems which might arise, as can be seen from the following section.

5.2.3 *Savoir Comprendre and Savoir Faire* Misunderstandings

Could the participants identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction, and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present?

In this section, two of the definitions offered by Byram were used. The first definition was used in order to discover whether participants were able to identify possible problems which might arise during the exchange visit. The second would indicate whether they could use their knowledge and skills to deal with them. Responses were divided into categories after the analysis of the transcripts.

ICL Low skills - difficulty in perceiving the existence of a problem

ICM Medium skills - the problem is perceived but solution not offered

ICH High skills - a problem is perceived and a solution taking account of cultural difference is offered

Question 3 Can you think of problems which might arise during a visit and how you might deal with them?

The responses here are divided into two groups (5.2.3.1.1 and 5.2.3.1.2), the first mentioned by those who had taken part in an exchange and the second by those who had no practical experience of dealing with a foreign visitor.

5.2.3.1 (4 responses 2 ICH 2 ICM)

One problem identified here concerned a visitor who would have too much free time in school. This problem was mentioned by two participants.

They wouldn't find that very easy. They would have to go out because there are only set lessons you have for sport. They would have to find other things to do. They haven't really known how to do that yet, because they haven't had the chance

What would you say to someone who was having that kind of difficulty?

Go to the extra lessons there are. They do like.. things, develop other interests, investigate what is out there for you, see what works really
(A26F – 1 ICH)

Another reflected on how she might encourage a visitor to accept the wearing of a school uniform, explaining it, not as an imposition on the individual but as a way of experiencing British lifestyle to the full, including adapting uniform to teenage fashion:

I think I'd say that if they didn't like to wear it, well they really have to, because it's part of our life and they have come to join in our lifestyle, and so they should really join in fully, instead of just participating in part of it. And I'd probably try to make them like kind of wear school uniform, but casually kind of thing, because there are different ways of wearing the school uniform, not necessarily strict.

You'd just sort of get round it a little bit, yes?

Because, in the sixth form it's like black trousers and red tee shirt, but they could just wear black jeans and a red top. To them it wouldn't actually seem as if they were wearing it, but they would. We try to do like that. (G04F – 1 ICH)

Another participant from the same institution had discussed the question with the French assistant, and understood the problem, but was unable to find a solution:

I don't know. It's just something that has always happened in England, so I don't really know what I would say (G03F – 1 ICM)

5.2.3.2 (10 responses 2 ICH 3 ICM 5 ICL)

In this group the five male participants were notably different from the females. This may have been due to the fact that girls of this age tend to be more interested in discussing relationships and problems. Problems included xenophobic remarks, food and school uniform difficulties. Responses from boys tended to minimise problems

Xenophobic remarks:

Probably that even the sort of, other English people do get some sort of teasing, whatever, and that it's not sort of as serious as it might appear (D127M - 1 ICM)

School Uniform:

I don't know how I'd break it to someone that they actually had to wear uniform, especially if they were taking it very seriously, I don't know how I'd go about doing it (D123M - 1 ICL)

.Whereas in a uniform you are all, you know Jack the Lads...Well if he didn't want to wear the uniform then, and if the school permitted it, fair enough..... (D126M - 1 ICL)

Responses from girls, on the other hand, tended to resemble those given by exchange participants in that they attempted to provide practical solutions and compromises to difficulties, which might be encountered.

In France they don't cook the meat as much. They like it more rare, and English food is a lot more cooked, even the vegetables - like when you go out for a pub meal, all the vegetables are in a stew and they are all soggy.

Would you have some advice for them?

Well it would depend who they were staying with. They'd have to say something to them and like mention that they weren't used to it, and maybe they could compromise between the two ways. (A31F - 1 ICH)

There were other occasions during the interviews where male and female responses tended to differ. However, as the numbers were small, and all the males were to be found at one institution, a boys' private school, there would possibly be other factors involved which would make it difficult to generalise on the basis of their replies.

A general overview of the data obtained from this section of the interview would point to the fact that, although upper secondary students of French begin their studies with positive attitudes of openness and curiosity towards the culture, they possess little concrete information. It seems that knowledge gained either in the classroom or experientially, that is to say, based on exchange visits, study visits, and holidays, is retained and used as a basis for reflection and hypothesis about the foreign culture. Some knowledge may have been obtained in the classroom in lower secondary school, but there was little evidence from the interviews that this was the case.

As was pointed out above, cultural knowledge obtained during the study of a new topic during the Advanced level course tends to be compared with students' own experience in a straightforward manner. Given the agenda of the modern language classroom - that of linguistic competence - it is very likely that information obtained from a single text will be compared directly with their own experience and that the information will, in the process, be generalised by the student. As Zarate points out:

La perception de l'autre est construite à travers le prisme déformant de la compétence culturelle d'origine. (1986:24)

5.2.4. *Savoir Comprendre*

Here Byram's definition of the skill

(a) identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins

was modified to take into account the maturity and experience of the participants and the two documents (Appendices A and B) chosen at this stage were easily accessible to the readers in terms of their content. The first document presented a picture of England through the eyes of an American writer and the second a picture of France through the eyes of an English writer. Participants were asked to explain some elements which would be difficult for an outsider to the culture to understand. In the case of the Bryson document, the outsider would be French and in the case of Mayle the outsider would be an English person who had never studied French or been to France.

Although it is clear that students at this stage would not possess the knowledge about another culture in order to exercise the skills at the level defined by Byram ie

- read a document or event, analysing its origins/sources-and the meanings and values which arise from a national or other ethnocentric perspective (stereotypes, historical connotations in texts) and which are presupposed and implicit, leading to conclusions which can be challenged from a different perspective (1997:61)

The fact that, as linguists, they are constantly exposed to foreign language texts, might enable some of them to distinguish instinctively between the skills of translation and interpretation and to understand the difference between insider and outsider perspectives from their own position on the borderline between the two. The precise nature of such a skill is illustrated by reference to the work of Kramsch (1993:205-232). In discussing the problems involved with 'teaching language along the cultural faultline', she describes the complex manner in which cultures (C1 and C2) have superimposed upon them a cultural imagination that is no less real, creating a situation where myth and reality both contradict and reinforce each other. The result is that 'the teacher of culture is faced with a kaleidoscope of at least four different reflections of facts and events' (ibid 207). Kramsch goes on to advise that - 'What we should seek in cross-cultural education are less bridges than a deep understanding of the boundaries'

In this context bridges might be compared with translations with the help of a dictionary, which purport to transfer meaning in a straightforward manner. To help learners to gain understanding of the boundaries she advises 'Systematic training of learners in insiders' and outsiders' views of cultural phenomena should start early on with activities that require learners to adopt different ways of seeing'. (ibid 229) Such a process might be equated with the concept of interpretation. One might suppose here that some upper secondary language learners would become aware of the need to identify ethnocentric perspectives and explain their origins, whether or not such a skill were taught systematically in class.

Analysis of the transcripts divided participants into three categories High (3), Medium (7) and Low (4) as far as their general skills of interpretation were concerned. High skills included not only the ability to indicate elements, which needed to be interpreted, but also to give an appropriate explanation and comment. Low skills indicated that only a few random words or phrases were underlined and that the explanations did not take account of another culture. The following table gives the words or phrases most frequently underlined in the Bryson text. It will be followed by comment and quotation, where appropriate

5.2.4.1 Extract from Notes from a Small Island (Bryson)

Table 5.2.a Summary of Responses - Bryson

Words and phrases	Number of times underlined
Drystone walls	10
People apologising to me when I conk them	9
Wuthering Heights	8
Crumpets	8
Northern glory	7
Mustn't grumble	7
Marmite	6

Drystone walls are a particular feature of Northern English landscape and it was appropriate that inhabitants of this landscape would see the need to interpret a particular feature to a French person. The question of apologising, together with the rather stoical attitude represented by the expression 'mustn't grumble', was discussed with participants, all but one of whom agreed that it was a feature of British life which would appear strange to foreigners. One of those who had taken part in exchanges to France and Spain used her own experience to form her judgement:

Do you think that's typically English?

Yes, because I'm not too sure about France, but especially in Spain, you never say thank you or please or sorry. I think it's the same in France as well (G03F - 1)

Wuthering Heights (Emily Bronte) is generally regarded as an English classic literary text of the 19th Century and this fact would have to be explained to a foreigner. It would perhaps not be surprising to teachers of English literature that not all participants recognised the title. Of those who underlined Northern Glory, most were able to explain the expression in terms of local landscape features

The two items of food mentioned by Bryson would probably be more familiar to older British people, than to the young people concerned. Indeed, it was remarked that the whole picture of Britain presented in the text was old-fashioned and rural. Although the food items were described accurately there were no suggestions as to why the taste or texture might be strange to French people. There were two instances of participants assuming that they would be familiar.

The impression gained during this part of the interview was that of interest in the task on the part of the participants. In some cases, discussion of the text enabled them to reflect upon aspects of their own culture. For example, most were unaware that seaside piers were specifically British, but two people who had spent holidays in France were able to draw distinctions which, in a classroom situation, might have led to discussion and cultural comparison concerning social class and the use of public space:

Seaside piers, like at Blackpool and stuff, because it's not the same in France. It's like, more refined and it's sort of nicer (laughter) And you have like arcades and in stuff in England and greasy chips. (A31F - 1)

And then seaside piers. Take any example of a seaside pier - it's typical England. I've never seen it, I don't think I've seen a pier in France when I've been.

Could you explain why it's typically English?

Well, most of them look as if they're going to fall down.....they've got amusements, some of them ice cream stalls, and English people just having a good day at the seaside (D122M - 1)

When attempting to define 'Northern glory', another identified the description with her own region and realised that she would have to explain the qualities which made the North attractive for its inhabitants:

The bit about Northern glory - they probably wouldn't understand it and I'd probably say it's because the North is really something special. It's away from everything else, it's full of countryside, trees, fields. (G05F -

1)

The difference between translation and interpretation is clear in these explanations, which distinguish between meaning to the native speaker and significance in terms of culture, which is not apparent to the outsider:

Yes, and beans on toast, which of course a foreigner would understand, but it's an English idiom to say beans on toast, because everyone knows what it is...it's a cheap and quick meal, which probably isn't eaten in France (D124M - 1)

Milk in bottles, beans on toast, stinging nettles - they are things we take for granted because we know exactly what they mean. I don't know how much a French person may understand English culture....(D123M - 1)

In the third and final interview participants were given another text which tested their *savoir comprendre* again and their skills at the end of the course were compared with the beginning in Section 5.5. As far as can be ascertained from these data, students at this level are disposed to use skills of interpreting and relating in connection with their own culture. Some, indeed, display evidence of a skill, which could be developed in appropriate ways.

5.2.4.2 Extract from A Year In Provence (Mayle)

Table 5.2.b Summary of Responses - Mayle

Words and Phrases	Number of times underlined
Gendarme	15
Café-crème	12
Pastis	12
Pommes frites	9
Garlic in plaits	8
Lottery ticket seller	5

It was perhaps not surprising that words which needed to be translated from the French were most frequently underlined. In this part of the interview, the comments made by individual students in response to Mayle's description of a village market through the eyes of an English tourist were more significant than their explanations of particular features. For example, those who had travelled as tourists in France made the most detailed comments and compared with British equivalents. This might indicate that their experiences in France had already contributed towards a framework of cultural understanding, and that information from the text was readily fitted into this pre-existing system:

The bit about gendarme swallowed a surreptitious pastis, it's like a policeman drinking and everything, so that's, you just wouldn't see a policeman in a bar in England... you don't really sell olives out of baskets, you buy them in shops in this country.(A31F – 1 Holiday visits to France)

It's a very different attitude towards the animals there. They just cram them in these crates and take them off to the market (D127M – 1 House in France)

The smell of the river, the fact they had more gypsies in the street who sell lemons and garlic, and well the whole idea of the market there. (G03F - 1 Holiday and exchange visits)

Those who had little experience of France or whose experience was confined to the North made only few comments on the market or the café scene. This could have been due to the fact that it was outside their own experience and they did not possess a suitable framework within which they could situate the new facts.

At the end of the interview, when both texts had been discussed, participants were asked whether outsiders had a different view of a country from a native. This question drew some very perceptive comments, whether or not they had been very successful in 'interpreting' elements of their texts. One realised that an outsider to a culture might well seek to confirm knowledge, which had already been obtained through literature:

They have a view of a country, which comes from what's written about it, what comes out of a country. Certainly the one about England dwells a lot on the scenery and refers to the Wuthering Heights like expanses, which is related to England because of the way it's, well we have a lot of literature which is like that, and the general English culture is one of the landscapes. (D124M – 1)

Another indicated the way in which the new culture would be viewed through the prism of the familiar culture, leading to exaggeration of elements which would be considered exotic:

It's still from the view of someone who finds this all incredibly strange incredibly different, so he's going to exaggerate it, maybe and not really understand how it fits in with the lifestyle, the climate (G03F – 1)

Another considered that writers tended to draw upon stereotypes and generalisations. Referring to the Bryson text she said:

What they say about the people, they seem to make it like, polite all the time, mustn't grumble and terribly sorry. And it's just not true at all. It's kind of what people want to see, a romantic kind of idea. (A26F – 1)

The above responses, together with the general tenor of replies to questions on the two texts may help to clarify our ideas about the potential of foreign language students to acquire intercultural competencies at this stage of their development. If we remember that the tasks were new to the participants and that, to some extent, the interview itself was part of the learning process (Byram 1996:84) it seems that students at this stage are able to distinguish between translation and interpretation where the task is appropriate to their linguistic skills and cultural experience. The very fact that they attempted to explain, analyse and draw

conclusions seems to indicate that they were at a suitable stage of cognitive development for such activities to form part of their language and culture learning.

It was also clear, during the interviews, that the evidence they were obtaining about French culture was being processed in a similar way to the processing of their linguistic knowledge. They were attempting to fit their knowledge into a pattern. However, as Zarate warns, instinct will lead the student to view new information through the prism of his/her own culture, with the result that the view will be distorted and confused (op.cit 1986:24)

As can be seen from the above quotations, some of the participants were aware that perception can be deformed by existing preconceptions of a culture. If this were to be made more explicit in the language classroom, this could be related to the learning of intercultural competencies. In addition, the need to interpret language in context, whether documentary, literary, or oral, seems at present to be somewhat neglected, and is an issue which will be discussed in more detail in Section 5, when comparisons will be made with this and a similar task carried out during the third interview. Other pedagogical implications will also be discussed in the final chapter.

5.3. The Second Interview

The interviews conducted in the summer of 1997 were longer and more comprehensive than the first or the third. In the case of the first interviews, participants were adjusting to the demands of Advanced level courses and in the third, they tended to be preoccupied with their forthcoming examinations. In the second interview data relating to attitudes, knowledge and skills were obtained, and participants' increased confidence and maturity enabled them to think and discuss in a creative manner. The main research question at this stage concerned the ability of language students to develop alternative perspectives; to see their own culture from the point of view of an outsider (*savoir-être*), to focus on cultural connotations within language, to view an historical event from the dual perspective of British and French cultures (*savoirs*) and to consider social

distinctions and their markers (*savoirs*). *Savoir faire* was explored in the context of negotiating non-verbal interaction and *savoir comprendre* in explaining the sociocultural connotations of specific words.

5.3.1 *Savoir-être and Savoir S'engager* Other Perspectives

At the beginning of the interview, the investigation of *savoir-être* was pursued, developing Byram's definition

- (b) *interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar phenomena in their own culture*

and, in some cases

- (c) *willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment (savoir s'engager)*

5.3.1.1 French Perspectives on British Phenomena.

Firstly, participants were asked to think of two or three things, which were typically British and then to say how they thought French people might view them¹. With the exception of one who could not readily imagine how French people might view Britain, participants responded readily and seemed to enjoy the experience of comparing and contrasting points of view. This might have been because the question of devolution had recently raised the topic of 'Britishness' in the media. The following table shows the subjects spontaneously offered and put in order of frequency. The words and phrases give the flavour of what was said. Sometimes they are paraphrased, sometimes they are verbatim quotations. More detailed responses have been quoted where there was an attempt to clarify or explain differences by sociological or historical references.

¹ Inevitably, the use of the terms 'British' and 'French' will draw on stereotyped ideas. However, as Chambers (1997) discovered, such generalisations exist among learners and cannot be ignored by teachers. Here they are deliberately used to uncover participants thinking on the subject.

Table 5.3.a Summary of Responses – British Phenomena

British Phenomena	No. of References	French Perspective
Food (roast/fried) Sunday lunch	6	Fatty, greasy, stodgy, all on one plate, only one course, Yorkshire puddings.
Cricket	5	Boring, wouldn't understand it, middle, upper class
Royal family	4	Jealous of us, see them as famous, like other show business people
The pub	4	Approval, sociable, stand at the bar, buy rounds, food, in the country.
Tea	4	Quaint, calm, nice, civilised, imperialist past
Beer drinking	3	Connotations with hooligans, fights, contrast with wine at mealtimes
Rain	2	Misty, rain all the time, London smog, Spring visits in the rain
Changing of the guard	1	Clinging to the past, traditional
Wimbledon	1	Grass court, strawberries and cream
Boat race	1	Wonderful, Oxbridge reputation
Last night of the proms	1	In awe at the unity of the British, strange but enjoyable

To what extent do the above responses indicate the ability to take on the perspective of French people, as opposed to an ability to mention a concept commonly associated with Britain? In answers relating to food, where most participants had direct experience of eating in France, aspects which were familiar, agreeable, even comforting to a native, were seen from another perspective as indigestible, poorly presented and unfamiliar. Those who mentioned cricket largely shared the view they attributed to the French. In this case it was more difficult to draw a distinction. However, one participant attempted to elaborate her view, by using her knowledge of social class structure and taking the role of an observer of the British class system:

Like a working society, all together, team work, but more middle class than. I don't think it would be very high class - because they like polo.

It's more a middle class game, like gentlemen playing in the white, and the deck chairs,..... having their tea (A26F – 2)

There was a general awareness, perhaps gained from reading French popular magazines, that the royal family were a focus of interest for French people. One person even suggested that they might inspire jealousy! Another distinguished the English historical view of the royal family and a French contemporary view:

I don't think they think of them the same way we do. To the French they are like famous people, but to the English they are like an institution. It's like somebody who used to make decisions. They have a lot of historical importance. To the French they are just like people who live now and they're just famous people, photographs in magazines and stuff. They don't see everything else they are involved in (A31F – 2)

Those who mentioned the pub were able to point to aspects which are taken for granted in this country, but which would be unusual to a French person, such as standing at the bar or buying rounds. Those who mentioned tea stressed the idea that it was 'just a drink, like coffee' to a native, while a foreigner might link it to concepts associated with stereotypes about British people:

You sit down, have a quick moment to spare, have a cup of tea. It's not even tea - it could be cup of coffee or something.

What would tea mean to French people?

They would think of us drinking itthey don't actually have what we call tea-time, but I don't know, it's a nice idea, I mean it's very quaint (A26F – 2)

They would probably see it as very calm, civilised, very old fashioned and imperialistic.....obviously it did when we had an empire, but nowadays it's just a drink. It's the same as coffee. (G03F – 2)

Beer drinking was chosen by those who were aware of the reputation of the British abroad. One person explained her view that both nations tended to attribute heavy drinking of either wine or beer to the other and went on to explain that during her exchange:

They didn't drink at all when I was there. I just presumed they would. I thought that the parents would drink at meals. I didn't expect the

children to, but they (the parents) didn't, which I found a bit strange,
(G05F-2)

There were several other instances of participants who referred to stereotyped ideas, which were consciously adjusted when they had encountered situations which did not fit their preconceptions and these will be discussed further in the next section

5.3.1.2 French Perspectives on British Characteristics

The subsequent question, which related to ideas British people have about themselves and about how French people would consider these ideas provided responses which were, in general, less analytical. With more concrete examples of 'British phenomena' and their knowledge of France, gained through the experience of visits and the classroom work, French perspectives were more readily visualised and contrasted with insider perspectives. However, the question concerning British characteristics, concerning more abstract concepts, proved to be more demanding and participants tended to provide auto-stereotypes and state that French people would share their view. In some cases auto-stereotypes were justified by contrasting hetero-stereotypes about the French, with experience during a visit or exchange being offered as evidence. For example, comparisons were made between lifestyles, which were relaxed or rushed on the basis of contrast with life at home and life during an exchange visit. There were, however, a number of attempts to refine opinions and more complex responses, which offered explanations and examples are quoted below.

Table 5.3.b Summary of Responses – British Characteristics

Characteristic	British	No of References	French Perspective
Reserved, undemonstrative		5	Would share the view, mostly visit London, don't see outgoing people. French are more demonstrative.
Proud, superior		2	French would mock this
Polite		2	Would agree. Wouldn't agree if they saw a football match.
Organised, tidy		2	Would agree, contrast with France
Laid back, relaxed		1	French rush about
Rush to make money		1	French laid back, spend time with family
Punctual		1	French always late
Ignorant and loud or snobby and posh		1	French would agree, see same class divisions
North south divide		1	French would agree

Although other perspectives on their own culture were difficult to imagine in this context, there was evidence that some participants were willing, and to some extent able, to show the beginnings of a more sophisticated skill defined by Byram as *savoir s'engager*.

(c) willingness to question the values and pre-suppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment

One participant explored the concept of freedom in British and French contexts of politics, the media and personal values:

We aren't free. You think you are because you've got your rights, but we are not really, because there is no constitution, like in France. There is one - specially this publicity thing after Diana and stuff. They have got it well restricted in France. I think the press are freer in England than they are in France, but the people in France are freer than we are in England.

Do you think that is because of the constitution, or because they feel free in other ways?

It's kind of the constitution, but because they don't have the same barriers as us. They are not restricted by them. The pace is much slower and they don't have, I mean compared to the English, I don't think they have the materialist values much. We are always out for more work and more money....I mean we are very restricted by that, having to fit in with such a fast pace of life (A26F – 2)

It was evident here that the speaker had been active in viewing values in her own culture which were taken for granted, from a French point of view. This attitude would enable her eventually, and in a suitable educational setting, to develop the skill of critical cultural awareness (Byram 1997:61) At this point, she can be contrasted with another participant in another institution who was not yet ready to question values she shared with her peers:

When we've been looking at what young people want in their society and like when we've been looking at the French sheets, there has been there has been a lot of like - freedom and they want the country to be more together, whereas that doesn't apply to us. We are not really that bothered about keeping our English values

That is interesting. So you studied young French people and what they thought was specifically French and their values, did you?

It was the most important things in their life, and top of their list was freedom, like liberty, whereas top of ours was work and jobs – we all agreed that. (C110F – 2)

Another participant, reflecting on the question of driving, was beginning to question auto-stereotypes in the manner discussed by Kramersch. The fact that his explanations are not clear is an indication that he was struggling with the fact that 'myth and reality both contradict and reinforce one anotheryet, myths cannot be discarded, for they affect the way learners of a foreign language see others in the mirror of themselves, despite all evidence to the contrary from objectively transmitted facts'.(1993:207)

Another example, the British think that we are good drivers, and think that the French and the Germans and the Italians are bad drivers. I think the French would have to disagree with that.

Why would that be?

Well, I think they would think themselves to be good drivers, even though

everyone has passed a test to be able to drive. I think the French people would find we were arrogant when we were on the road, and I don't think they have as much road rage in France as we do in England, but I think the French would disagree (sic) Although I think the French drive a lot more carelessly than the British people and drive a lot faster
(D122M – 2)

In addition to this there is other valid evidence to support the fact that participants made some effort to reflect upon the opinions they had expressed and attempted to find some explanations relating to alternative perspectives. This may have been a response to the fact that this aspect was being researched, because it was evident that, in many cases, this was the first time participants had reflected on these matters.

The question of alternative perspectives on British culture evidently featured in some of the classroom activities, where texts were studied which related to a British topic, such as the BSE crisis, or in the case of the royal family, which was mentioned by one of the teachers who was interviewed for the project. It is likely that the study of such texts helped students to consider an alternative view of their own society. The question of classroom activities and the role of the teachers in discussing stereotypes and presenting alternative views of British society will be further discussed in Section 5.5 and in the final chapter.

5.3.2 Savoirs Knowledge about France

In the Common European Framework there is a distinction made between knowledge of the world, defined in abstract terms, and sociocultural knowledge defined by means of a taxonomy of 'topic areas'. Byram does not make such a distinction, but uses terms such as 'historical and contemporary relationships, national memory and national definitions of geographical space', 'social distinctions and their principle markers'. The problem in terms of data collection was to define how much knowledge about France might be expected from an Advanced level student and whether this knowledge would correspond with the objectives defined in terms of national memory and historical and contemporary relationships (Byram 1997:59)

5.3.2.1 A Dual Perspective on National Memories

As stated in Section 4.7.3.2, it was decided to extend the concept of 'dual perspective' already explored above, into the historical and geographical domains. Thus Byram's definitions implying the detailed knowledge, which would be accessible to the mature intercultural speaker, such as a diplomat or interpreter, would need to be reinterpreted to correspond with the knowledge which students at this stage could be expected to have acquired.

In Britain, the study of history is obligatory up to the age of 14 and extended by visits, family stories, television and fiction. It was therefore assumed that the participants would be likely to have some simple basic information about a number of historical events, which had involved Britain and France, such as 1066 (The Battle of Hastings) Joan of Arc, the French Revolution, Napoleon and the Second World War. Participants were asked to make comments from the viewpoint of French people generally and British people generally. The quality of the responses and the readiness with which the participants took a dual perspective would, it was hoped, provide some information about potential intercultural competencies in this field.

Eleven participants responded at the point of their second interview (1997) at the end of the first year of Advanced level study. The content of the responses was then divided into two categories (a) sufficient knowledge to discuss and speculate and (b) insufficient knowledge to discuss and speculate. In the cases of Joan of Arc and Napoleon it transpired that only two participants had sufficient knowledge to continue the discussion. Nine were able to discuss the French revolution, seven the Battle of Hastings and six the Second World War and the analysis will concentrate on these three events.

(Subsequent reference to history syllabuses revealed that the emphasis had moved away from the traditional linear study of historical events to be replaced by document study, social history and local studies. Since that date (1997) there have been some adjustments to the National Curriculum in History, and it seems

likely that, in future, students of this age will have studied history in terms of its establishment of a 'collective memory' in relation to their own society.)

Two participants were studying Advanced level history and others had evidently studied a more traditional course at some point, or had obtained their information from general reading. They provided the most detailed and analytical responses. In other cases the knowledge, while being sufficient to allow some discussion, was not at all detailed. Nevertheless, some participants were able to carry out the task and, given the fact that they were not prepared for the questions, they produced some interesting responses

As explained in Section 4.7.3.2, Byram's definitions

(a) historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries

(d) the national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries

(e) the national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries

were combined into one concept and followed the same principles as the previous section, that is to say, the ability to hold a dual perspective on a number of historical events common to the collective memory of both France and Britain. The participants were told:

We are going to look at history and I'm going to mention a few historical events. I'd like you to tell me how they might be seen by the French and by the British'

Table 5.3.c Views of the Battle of Hastings

1066 Viewed by the French	1066 Viewed by the British
Won battle, proud, joyous	Invaded, defeated, wouldn't celebrate
Last invasion of England, not pleased but it has worked out OK	Proud, conquerors, always being invaded (by Germans)
Bayeux tapestry, proud, bad Harold, good William	Most people don't know – just a battle
Great victory, everyone celebrating	Didn't like William, nobles took over
Normans looked down on Saxons as rough and vulgar, not people to live with	Not happy, conquered by the French
Proud, happy, pleased with themselves	Resent losing, not pleased

For most participants it was difficult, perhaps, to envisage different contemporary perspectives on an event which had taken place so long ago. In general, the participants were not able to take a dual perspective beyond a rather simplistic level, which can hardly be considered an intercultural competence. A dual perspective in this instance would consider some of the long-term attitudes which could be traced to the event. There were exceptions to this. For example, the response from a student of Advanced level history, who compared the Norman invasion of Britain with other invasions into France:

It was like the last of the invasions into England. I don't think we were particularly pleased at being invaded, but now it has worked out OK

So how do you think French people feel when they talk about 1066?

I think they would be really proud of it, the conquerors. Because they are always being invaded anyway, especially by Germans, so it's something they can be proud of. (A26F – 2)

Another, who had seen the Bayeux tapestry, had been helped to realise the significance of the event for the French. His response is yet another example of the importance of visual stimuli, fieldwork, and experiential learning in the domain of intercultural competencies. As in a later example, he drew on other dimensions, in this case moral values, to elaborate his response:

I've seen the Bayeux Tapestry and they are very proud of it, that their King of Normandy became King of England. The bad Harold and the good William. The good won over the bad. It is very much on show that

they managed to do this and that a Norman person has become King of England and that's something that they are proud of. The English, when you say 1066, just the Battle of Hastings. Most people don't really know what it means, just something that happened, a battle and what did it represent?. (D127M – 2)

Another perspective on the event involved an attempt to explain long-standing resentment between Britain and France in terms of social differences at the time of the Norman Conquest:

Well, the French and the English, up until recently were always lifelong enemies and it was when the French, Normans, took over England and replaced the King, I don't think the English would have been too happy when the French came across beating us.

They regard it as a defeat and generally.....?

Being conquered by the French

How do you think the French regard...?

The Normans were very cultured and the Saxons were still very rough and vulgar, so they probably thought of the Saxons as very low, way beneath them. They looked down on the Saxons and Saxons hated the Normans for their pointless ideals and behaviour

So the French....would regard 1066 as?

*As a good victory, but possibly not the people they wanted to live with.
(D123M – 2)*

As has been stated before, these views were articulated spontaneously in the course of an interview in the context of questions for which participants had not been prepared. A subsequent question about the French Revolution also produced responses which were not very fluent or detailed, but nevertheless demonstrated the fact that juxtaposition of opposing views could lead to creative, critical thinking. The following table will give an overview of the responses gained from the participants. Figures in brackets indicate the number of times the concept was mentioned by the total number of participants.

Table 5.3.d Views of the French Revolution

French Revolution seen by the French	French Revolution seen by the British
Democracy (4)	Beheading/guillotine (5)
Liberation/freedom from monarchy (3)	Killing aristocrats (3)
Freedom (3)	Fighting/danger (3)
Equality/power to the people (2)	Overthrow monarch (3)
Some still monarchists (2)	Revolt against authority (3)
A good thing (1)	Wary/ don't like the idea (2)
Just an historical event (1)	Houses ransacked (1)
Independence (1)	People in prison (1)
Change of inefficient government (1)	Old women (1)
More money for the poor (1)	Disorganised (1)
Pride in the revolution (1)	Louis dragged out of his palace (1)

The table indicates that, even with a minimum of factual knowledge students at this stage are able to distinguish quite clearly between two perspectives on the same event. This section called forth a number of reflections on the subject of French concepts of freedom, equality and democracy, which could be explored in a classroom context and in the target language.

There were also a number of assumptions made, perhaps on the basis of the media interest in Princess Diana at the time the interviews were carried out, concerning attitudes to the monarchy in general. It was unfortunate that the limited time allowed for the interviews did not allow for some of the potentially interesting ideas to be pursued in more depth.

The importance of experiential learning through travel and study visits is again shown in the example of one person who had visited Versailles, and, as a result, had become critical of the monarchy and identified himself with republican views. Would he have been able to reflect in the same way without having visited the chateau and grounds?

Well, my own (images) are the king being overthrown, everybody revolting against authority. I guess it makes me proud to think that people can do that. I think the French have a saying that they are proud of the generations before them that fought to overcome the king and queen.

You identify with that personally do you?(Yes) Do you think that you identify with that because you have studied French and you know more about the French people?

And I have visited places in France where the king used to live, not that I can remember much about it, but I remember things

What did you think when you visited..... Versailles.?

Well, the king had all the castle, the big castle all the grounds, and I could see that normal people were jealous and didn't agree with what he was doing, being greedy and so forth, and I think they were right to take over and fight against it

That's interesting. Do you think your view is typical of British people, or do you think British people might have a different view?

No, I think it would be typical, if people had visited Versailles and been to France, they would understand how important it is to French people. Then I think they would be quite proud

We've stuck with our monarchy

That could change (D122M – 2)

The final question concerned the Second World War seen from two perspectives. It was not evident that any participant had studied the subject in depth, although most seemed to have retained some basic facts and were able to make some comparisons. There was one institution, where La Peste (Camus) had been studied, and references to the Second World War had been explained by the teacher. The comments here will be examined in detail following the presentation of data from all participants.

Table 5.3.e Views of the Second World War

World War 2 seen by the French	World War 2 seen by the British
Occupied by Germany (5)	Helping/fighting with France (5)
French resistance (4)	Death (3)
Grateful to Britain (3)	Against Germans/Nazis (3)
Resenting the British (3)	Victory/glory (2)
Suffering (2)	Freer/less affected than the French (2)
Allies of Britain and America (2)	Associated with America (2)
Controls/rationing (1)	Bombs (2)
Collaboration with the Germans (1)	Atrocities (1)
	Rations/lack of food (1)
	Jews (1)

The impression gained at the end of this section was these young people had retained little concrete information about the Second World War. This was a little surprising, given the number of television programmes and films which are still devoted to the subject some sixty years later. Nevertheless, some were able to juxtapose alternate views of an event.

In the context of the literature being studied for Advanced level, one participant was able to illustrate how little information she had had before studying a literary text (*La Peste*) which had allowed her to access this period in French history. Her response indicates, on the one hand, how little declarative knowledge can be assumed in the case of students at this age, and, on the other, the way in which literary texts can make significant contribution to the cultural knowledge to be acquired during the learning of a foreign language. This point will be discussed further in the final chapter

Because you can see the parallel with the story and the German invasion of France. It makes it better than just a plague, - you see, in the beginning people in the plague, people are just getting on with what they are doing. They don't know what is actually happening, and they don't care as long as it doesn't interfere with their own lives - which is what happened pretty much with the German soldiers coming in. We see how it starts to affect people, they actually start to care. When the Germans actually came in they started to affect other peoples' lives, not just the Jews or something. It became more of a problem. And then gradually you see

how the comparison, people look out of windows and it's like people being imprisoned in concentration camps or something like that. And they stop caring about it, they just adapt to it, which is like the book. It's just people accepting the situation and collaborating with the Germans and not even putting up any resistance at all.

Yes, and did that surprise you? Because sometimes the image we get of wartime France is of the Resistance in films and so on? So when you read this, was this a new way of looking at France and the Occupation? Did it tell you things you didn't know before?

*Yes, because we had watched programmes like *Allo Allo*² which didn't do much for France at all. So it's like getting rid of all those ideas and you start looking at it in a different way, and you see that a lot of people everywhere just gave in, like in Germany and in other places, and it wasn't this big mass of resistance all the time.*

Would you judge this as being universal, that any country which was invaded would behave the same way, or were there things in the text which made you feel that this was specific to France or French attitudes?

I don't know. I think you get that sort of thing in any country in the world. You would find like there was a mixture of reactions. Of course there is going to be resistance, but it's just that in France it seemed that it was always put over that it was more than in other countries.....it makes you become more aware of things you didn't know.(A26F -2)

The fact that another participant confused the condition of soldiers in the Second World War with another television comedy series (*Blackadder*) which was actually set in the First World War, reinforced the impression that these young people had very sketchy impressions of the period under discussion. It could be argued that a lack of basic (rather than detailed) historical knowledge about their own and other European cultures would make it difficult to acquire the intercultural competencies (as described by Byram) at a later stage. The same point was made by a focus group of students of French at the pilot school, who were in their second year, and who took part in a pilot study discussion. They agreed that they would have liked to study some French history as a background to their study of the language. The implications of these results and the possibility of broadening the range of topics studied in the foreign language class prior to Advanced level, will be discussed in the final chapter.

²BBC comedy series about Occupation and Resistance in France

5.3.2.2. A Dual Perspective on Geographical Space

It was clear that not all students would have studied Geography prior to the beginning of the course and that even for those who had, it could not be assumed that '*definitions of geographical space in France and perspectives on them from Britain*' and '*definitions of geographical space in Britain and perspectives on them from France*' would be familiar. Nevertheless it was decided to rephrase the question in such a way as to explore the concept and to attempt an analysis of the results in terms of the responses. Firstly participants were asked to define the borders of their own region. This question was designed to encourage them to think in terms of regions and geographical spaces in an area already familiar to them. They were then asked to divide up Britain, as if they were describing it to an outsider, such as a French person and lastly to talk about regions of France from their own perspective.

The responses, in terms of definitions of Britain, were difficult to analyse. In all cases they seemed to reflect experience of travel within Britain and there was no real evidence of participants being able to view Britain from the perspective of a French person. However, detailed analysis of the transcripts revealed some data which might connect experience of travel with certain perspectives. A broader definition of the home region seemed to coincide with a more detailed overview of France as a geographical entity with distinct regions, whilst a narrower definition of the home area coincided with more vague, tourist images of France.

There were five participants who had travelled or stayed in France on several occasions, on exchange or on holiday. All these gave wider definitions of the North East of England, mentioning counties rather than towns and, when defining France, they mentioned distinctive areas rather than general tourist features. There were four others who had spent little or no time in France. In three of these cases they mentioned specific towns, rather than counties, as being in the north east and moved the boundaries closer to 'home'. Their definitions of France as a geographical entity were impressionistic, relying on tourist images. This group included two, who had spent time in Picardy on an exchange

but had not travelled elsewhere in France. The following tables allow for comparison between the two groups:

Table 5.3.f First Group -Travel to and in France

Definition of own Region	Definition of France
Up to the borders of Scotland, half way across the Pennines to the west, down to Middlesborough	Divided by car number plates, mountain area, industrial in the North, Landes on the Atlantic coast, pine trees, Alps, Belgian and Swiss borders, Pyrenees at the bottom
The North East going across the Pennines, the right hand side, down as far as Leeds, Sheffield, as north as the boundary to Scotland	Paris different to the rest of France. The Auvergne, Massif Central, like the North of England type area. South coast touristy. Strasbourg beautiful, Germanic
From Scotland down to Teeside, line down the middle.	Mediterranean coast at the bottom, Brittany, Corsica, Loire Valley, Rhone Valley. Paris separate, capital city, down to Strasbourg. Alps, mountains different climate.
From Yorkshire northwards and the Pennines eastwards	Already divided into departments and regions, which all have their own character. Normandy and Brittany very different. Mediterranean coast, Channel Coast, Atlantic coast, Alps Massif Central
Up to Berwick , south to Yorkshire, (Middle) split between the Lakes and that area.	Southern bit, Central southern bit, nice and sunny, mountains in the east and the centre. North like England in climate. Paris different culture from the rest.

Table 5.3.g Second group - Little or no travel within France

Definition of Own Region	Definition of France
North Yorkshire to border, middle of country before Carlisle	South of France, tourist attractions, wine chateaux, beaches, Paris, north west linked to Britain (sic) with high-rise flats
Newcastle, (others say it is bigger)	Centre, north and south, hot (like Spain) Paris, shops expensive
Newcastle, Sunderland, Teeside. Possibly to Scotland, Pennines, not York	Coast, South of France, vineyards, Paris, big buildings, small rural towns.
Durham, not north of Newcastle, not York	Paris, South of France like Spain. Amiens rest of France a bit like Durham, pretty

There does seem to be some connection between experiencing physical distance from one's own country, together with study of another which might contribute to geographical perspectives being more accurate and precise in the case of the first group. As all participants at this second stage had taken holidays outside Britain, this in itself would not explain the difference. However, the difference between several visits to France and holidays in Spain or Turkey is normally the mode of travel. The former usually involve driving through Britain and France, while the latter usually entail flight, where there is an entirely different experience of geographical space. For example, a flight from Newcastle to Turkey would be quicker than a drive from Newcastle to Birmingham. There might be other factors, such as the level of general knowledge, higher in certain individuals, which could explain the discrepancy between the two groups. However, as in the case of historical knowledge, there would be an argument for including some geographical knowledge about France and francophone countries in the GCSE syllabus in order to facilitate the acquisition of intercultural competencies at a later stage.

5.3.2.3 Social Distinctions and their Principal Markers

Byram (f) social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's

Practices relating to the acquisition of intercultural competencies include those of participant observation and ethnographic enquiry (Byram & Morgan et al 1994). These are methods which allow learners to acquire social knowledge about the target culture. As a first step, learners are usually trained to become observers and recorders of the cultural practices in their own environment, which was the case in the Ealing Project (Roberts et al 2000). In this instance it was not possible to set participants the task of observing others. However, it was decided to obtain some information about the objective knowledge participants had relating to social distinctions at their own level, among their peers. Would they only be able to define their own group, or would they be able to define a number of groups? Were they observant of adults around them and of the way in which people marked their distinction from others?

The world of the pre-university student is still largely confined to home, school and friends made at school. In many respects, inclusion in the wider society comes late for many young people in Europe. They have no need to note social distinctions as they are not under pressure to establish themselves in the world outside their social circle. It was not felt that responses to this section would furnish strong evidence as to the presence or absence of intercultural competencies. However, the semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for some remarks or comments to be pursued and these will be discussed, after the tabular summary. The subject also led naturally to the question of imitating the behaviours of others, which will be discussed in the following section

In the first instance participants were asked how young British people showed that they belonged to a particular social group. The most important social markers, as cited by the group, are tabulated:

Table 5.3.h Markers of Group Social Identity in Britain

Marker of Group Identity	No. of Times Mentioned
Clothes, dress the same, fashion statement	10
Sharing the same opinions	7
Tastes in music	6
Behaviour, reinforce group identity, act the same way	6
Going to the same places, walking in groups	5

The above responses cannot, in themselves be furnished as evidence of intercultural competence, as the responses from any group of young people would probably have been similar. They were, on the whole, group insiders who gave no further evidence of having reflected on their own culture. Their automatic responses can be contrasted with one participant who gave a more detailed analysis and comment on the groups she had noticed in her own school. Her response was that of the observer (participant or not) who had reflected on some of the wider implications which lay behind the adoption of social markers:

We have the Trevs and the Refugees at our school. The refugees are into Britpop and they have, not scruffy clothes, big padded clothes. And the Trevs are, like, not rich but they are really, not conservatively dressed

but neater, they have a neater appearance, like the popular ones...I mean they are more outgoing. And then you've got a group in the middle who don't just go about with either

Do they form a separate group or..?

I think so. They belong to a group, some of them go around with the Refugees I don't think any of them belong to the Trevs. They are average people. They don't form a group themselves. They just go with people in little groups.

You said the Refugees listened to Britpop. Do the Trevs listen to a special kind of music?

Pop music, Hanson and bop dance music.

Would they have fixed opinions on things if they belonged to a group, do you think?

The Refugees like to think they are free. I can do this and I can stop this, like the Glastonbury type people. The Trevs think they are better than anyone else, and they are just really confident, more confident than you would maybe expect someone to be (A26F – 2)

We might speculate as to the reasons why this one participant was able to take a more objective and analytical view than the other participants (although three others did briefly mention other groups than their own). She was in fact, the only one of the group to have had more than one exchange visit, and to have maintained a correspondence with her exchange partner. It was noted that she displayed a high level of competence in all activities. This, and other factors relating to intercultural competencies will be discussed in Section 5.

At the end of this section of the interviews all participants were asked what they would do to make themselves accepted by a social group other than their own.. The example of arriving at University was suggested. A supplementary question ascertained whether they would be prepared to change anything about themselves in order to make themselves acceptable to a new group. All were adamant that they would not change their appearance or their opinions in order to become acceptable to a new group. The point was not pursued at the interview as it was only used as an introduction to the more important information, concerning *savoir faire* – the skill of discovery and interaction.

5.3.4. *Savoir apprendre and savoir-faire* Negotiating Interaction

(c) *Identify similar and dissimilar processes of interaction, verbal and non-verbal, and negotiate an appropriate use of them in specific circumstances*

The following question was asked in order to discover whether this competence was present;

If you were giving advice to a friend who was going to live in France, would you advise them to change their behaviour, particularly the custom of greeting people by kissing on both cheeks, in order to be accepted by French people?

Responses to this question fell into three categories, which broadly corresponded to the individual's experience of France. All four of those who had experienced a school exchange (females), would advise a friend to *'go along with it', 'carry out the custom' 'just do it - it makes you fit in'. 'It is part of the culture, and once you get into it you just don't think about it any more'*. Two, who had had more limited experience of France in a study visit were more cautious *'try to fit in with their culture and way of life....it would take a bit of time' 'after a while to imitate but not at first...just as if you had been learning'*. Three who had had fairly extensive experience of France as tourists were the most cautious, *'I don't think I would advise them to copy exactly what people are doing; gestures are a minor point' 'If you were uncomfortable with it I would say not to do it' 'It's a fine line, it depends on the person'* Another was somewhat inconsistent on this point (and elsewhere in her interviews) She had not been on an exchange or holiday visit of significance, but had observed visitors from France in her school *'you shouldn't change.....later becameinitial shock but once they get used to it, it would be alright'*

The inconsistencies of adolescent thought have been well documented (Piaget 1958 Elkind 1981), and experienced by teachers and parents. Therefore, the fact that an individual can reject the possibility of adaptation to a group and then, moments later, recommend it to a friend, will not be surprising. It is indicative of the flexibility of thought, which is normal at this stage of development. It might also be assumed that the need, experienced in the case of exchange participants,

is to be part of a group rather than to refuse change. It may be that the participants, both the cautious and the enthusiastic, recognise the need to adapt in the case of an extended visit to France but not in the case of transfer to a British university, where they might assume that the same social norms exist. It is also evident that, the experiential learning which takes place at the time of an exchange visit can be highly significant in that it seems to provide an early opportunity for the development of basic intercultural skills and knowledge.

5.3.5 *Savoir Comprendre*

(a) Identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins

In the first and third interviews participants were asked to identify particular features in documents which were 'ethnocentric' to the extent that a foreign reader would not be able to access the cultural context without some further explanation. At this second stage attention was focused on the sociocultural connotations of some simple familiar words, which would normally have been encountered at an early stage and used frequently by students of French. To what extent, at this stage, did students realise that, instead of assuming perfect equivalence, it was necessary to establish difference and similarity by recourse to the sociocultural context, in order to interpret language and relate single words to their correct English or French context, particularly when the meanings seemed similar.

Neuner, in a discussion on the importance of establishing a semantic approach to vocabulary learning had encountered this problem in the teaching of English and German as a foreign language. He carried out a number of tests with German and foreign students and established a scale of difficulty on three levels. The first stage would consist of words with very similar meanings and the third would differ in many respects between languages and cultures with concepts such as school, health care, belief, freedom. With regard to the second stages he advises:

On prendrait les mots qui ont une connotation socioculturelle plus complexe et plus nuancée et qui doivent faire partie du vocabulaire à

enseigner. (1997:57-8)

This second stage might be represented by the list below, where common meanings differ according to the French or British context. The response represents the number of participants who gave definitions. The subsequent section will offer more detailed comment :

Table 5.3.i Different Definitions of Common Words

English Word	French Word	Responses
Café	Café	10
Coffee	Café	9
Family	Famille	6
Embrace	Embrasser	7
Terrace	Terrasse	Void
Wednesday	Mercredi	6
Bread	Pain	10
Church	Église	6
Christmas	Noel	7

Examination of the data revealed that one word terrace/terrasse had to be ignored, as the English meaning had been ambiguous. Church also caused some difficulty as a number of the participants were Catholic and for them the term was effectively the same as for the French. For this reason it will be discussed separately. There then remained three words, referring to concrete elements, which had been correctly defined in French and English context by almost all participants - bread, coffee and café - and a second category of words where sociocultural differences would need to be explained. The interpretations provided below are those provided by individuals, with the result that there is some repetition. Comment and discussion will follow each of the three categories.

5.3.5.1 Bread, Coffee, Café

Table 5.3.j The Difference between French and English Bread

Bread - English	Bread - French
White loaf	Crusty breadstick
Brown/white sliced bread	Baguettes, soft, white, crusty outside
Loaves, sliced, frozen	Bread sticks, baguettes, fresh
Cut loaf	Bread stick, buns, freshly baked
Little loaves of bread for sandwiches	Sticks of bread, butter and cheese
Sliced bread	Baguette or boule
Loaf of bread	Baguette
Loaf	Stick
For toast or sandwiches with butter	Important, with cheese, French roll
Sliced bread	Bread unsliced

Table 5.3.k The Difference between English and French Coffee

Coffee - English	Coffee - French
As a break at work	Creamy*
Normal	Frothy*
Any kind, instant, fresh	Normally fresh
Normally white	Smaller, espresso coffees
White	Black and cream
Out of a jar, in a mug, white, sugar	Various types, glass cup, black
Maxwell House, instant	Morning, large, weak, evening small and strong and black
Big mug of instant coffee	Small cup black coffee, very strong
Quick cup of coffee during lunch break	Sitting, taking a more relaxed approach

Table 5.3.l The Difference between English and French Cafés

Café - English	Café - French
Back street café, not pleasant	Outside in the sun, friends, watching people go past
Inside, out of the rain, cup of hot coffee	Parisian pavement, glass of cold lager
Big, greasy spoon, commercial	Side street, quiet chic
Grubby, chips	Outside seats, sandwiches
Little expensive, round tables, nice food*	Can eat outside, tables with umbrella
Where you drink coffee	Can drink alcohol, coffee, have meals
Probably French idea because of the word	Same as English, but less up-market
Drink coffee	Frothy drinks, hot chocolate
For tea or breakfast, quite run down	Social, for coffee or chocolate
Old fashioned tea room, roadside café	People come to meet each other

Given a few exceptions (marked*) where a confusion of French and Italian influences or a different personal experience seems to have produced an unexpected comment, the above results indicate that knowledge of sociocultural differences between English and French in these very straightforward contexts has allowed the participants to interpret correctly. Once again, those with most personal experience of France tended to produce the most vivid descriptions. The buying and eating of bread, drinking of coffee and visiting cafés all figure very frequently in the French which is learned in the first five years. It is also possible to buy French bread and coffee almost anywhere in Britain now, and French style cafés are to be found in most large towns. Hence it is likely that much younger pupils would produce very similar definitions. Therefore, for a student at this stage, the level of intercultural competence required to explain origins of confusion in meaning could be regarded as an absolute minimum.

5.3.5.2 Family, Embrace, Wednesday, Christmas, Church

In order to explain origins of sociocultural differences in the above words, it would be necessary to study the topics at a deeper level than that required by the GCSE syllabus (which requires the ability to discuss mainly tourist subjects and the concerns of the British 16 year old learner). Ability to explain the origins of differences in the four words above would imply a deeper understanding of family, traditions, school and social life than that needed to be a tourist or discuss one's own concerns.

Table 5.3.m The Differences between French and English idea of Family

Family - English	Famille - French
Smaller	Lots of children, happy, grandparents etc.
Close but not always together, rarely go out	Close knit, many activities together
Who you live with, loyalties towards family	Other relatives, aunts, grandma etc.
Four people	Lots of people
Your immediate family	Extended family as well
Mam, dad, etc. immediate family	Everyone who is related to you in any way

Participants at three of the institutions stated that they had studied this topic during the first year of their Advanced level course and all the responses listed below were from this group. Four of the five participants, who did not respond, had not studied the topic during their first year. Thus, in this case there was a clear link between course content and the ability to interpret differences.

Table 5.3.n The Difference between Embrace and Embrasser

Embrace - English	Embrasser - French
Handshake, rare occasion hug, reserved	Kisses, hugs, greetings, open
Brief affectionate hug	Very over the top, lots of kissing and hugging
When someone comforts you or you are in love	When you meet someone you know, kiss on cheek
Only with close friends	Kiss, shake hands with most people you meet
To hug someone	Probably to kiss, greet someone
To hug, show emotion	A greeting
Hug	Kiss on both cheeks

Understanding of this concept would imply some knowledge, and more importantly some experience, of non-verbal behaviours of French people in general. Once again, those who did not complete this section, apart from one who had taken part in an exchange, were those who had very little personal experience of France. Not all replies were precise in the sense that the element of formal social greeting implied in 'embrasser' had not been fully understood and a more general interpretation relying on a contrast between the 'reserved British' and 'demonstrative French' (as instanced by the term 'very over the top') was used by two of this group. It was clear from other data that they were aware of the way in which French people greet each other, even if they could not in interpret the word 'embrasser'

Table 5.3.o The Difference between Wednesday and Mercredi

Wednesday - English	Mercredi - French
No definition given	A day when French schools have a half day (as far as I can remember)
Like any other day	Half day at school
Boring like any other day of the week	Finish school early
A weekday	Sometimes a holiday
Normal working day	Half day off school
Full day	Half day off

The fact that Wednesday is either a full or half day off for most French schoolchildren is usually taught at some stage in a French course for schools, although it is unlikely that it would be stressed in the preparation for GCSE. Four of those who answered this section had taken part in an exchange and two had not. Of those who did not answer, two were frequent holiday visitors to France and the others had little personal experience. Those who had discussed school life during the course seemed to have concentrated on other differences between the *lycée* and the sixth form/college.

Table 5.3.p The Difference between English and French Christmas

Christmas - English	Noel - French
More important than Noel	New Year is more important in France
Decorations, presents, not very religious	More religious, Father Christmas, nativity
Traditional, snow, Father Christmas	A big dinner
Commercial affair, turkey, sweets, Queen's speech, BBC movie	Presents in shoes, low key
The same but celebrated more in England	Holier in France
Round a tree, fairy lights, mince pies, stockings	Shoes, no tree, crèche
A religious day, also for children when they get presents	Important religiously in some places, nativity scenes.

It is likely that some mention of Christmas traditions would occur in a French course for schools. However, it is not an obligatory topic for the GCSE examinations, nor was it mentioned as a topic studied in the Advanced level course. Of the four participants who had no correct information at all, two had little experience of France and two had spent several holidays there. All the

exchange participants and two others had some relevant information. As on other occasions, religious belief was attributed to the French, perhaps because of the habit of setting up a crèche in the home. The evidence would point to memories of early lessons on the subject, rather than experiential knowledge or more recent discussions on family traditions in France.

Table 5.3.q The Differences between Church in English and French

Church - English	Église - French
Quite plain, austere	Very RC, incense, candles, etc. (had visited a church in France)
Mixture of religions, declining in popularity	Catholic, quite heavily believed in, Mass
Not everyone goes to church	Take it very seriously, quite a lot of children confirmed

It was expected that answers in this section would refer to the fact that in English, Church usually refers to the Protestant Church of England, while in France it would refer to the institution of the Catholic Church or its buildings. Of the four participants from a Catholic school two replied 'same', one did not reply and another gave an irrelevant response (dark, cool/pointy steeple). When these participants were discounted, there remained three who had indicated some relevant differences. As in the previous section (Christmas), an interesting result from this section is the fact that religious belief, once again seems to be attributed to French people and contrasted to lack of belief/practice in Britain. This feature of the responses can also be compared to answers to Question 6, where auto-stereotypes were justified by the hetero-stereotypes relating to the French. A mythical 'Otherness' is constructed by the learner, on the basis of perceived opposites to British culture. Kramsch (1993:207) explains this complex relationship between 'myth and reality which both contradict and reinforce each other' in the context of cultural learning. Which myths and which reality lead to young British people from a Protestant background (since this phenomenon was not observed among the participants from the Catholic school) attributing religious belief so readily? It is unfortunate that there was not enough time during the interviews to pursue the point. One might speculate that there are

a number of reasons, including the fact that 'Otherness' within their own society is often associated with religious belief (Moslems, Hindus)

The reluctance of teachers to discuss questions relating to religious belief and practice is natural, in that they may feel that the subject is private and too sensitive to be discussed with young people. However, in the context of intercultural competencies, which include an understanding of social identity and necessarily cover issues relating to values and beliefs, the historical and cultural role of organised religion and its relation to the state should not be ignored. The question will be discussed at greater length, together with the practice of attribution to other cultures, in the final chapter.

In Section 3, *savoirs*, *savoir apprendre*, *savoir faire* and *savoir comprendre* have been explored in various ways, notably interest in discovering other perspectives on one's own culture and its relationship with another and the identification of ethnocentric perspectives. In the first place it is clear that in concrete situations, the participants were able to take on the perspective of French people and to view aspects of their own culture from the outside. In the more delicate area of personal characteristics however, they were more likely to refer to auto and heterostereotypes without being able to analyse them. In some cases, however, there was evidence of developing competencies. In *savoir apprendre*, *savoir faire* and *savoir comprendre* there was evidence that some participants were able to negotiate appropriate non-verbal interaction and identify alternative perspectives in a document. This was particularly the case if the topic had arisen in class or if there had been experiential learning. Further discussion of these results and other issues will be taken up in Section 5 and the final chapter.

5.4 The Third Interview

Introduction

The third and final interviews were conducted just before the Advanced Level examinations in 1998. It was evident that participants' thoughts were largely focused on their exams and these interviews were not as long or far ranging as

the previous two. It also proved impossible to contact two of the participants who had taken part in the first and second stages.

It was important at this stage to discover whether intercultural competencies, which had been uncovered at earlier stages, had developed, as a concomitant of learning which had taken place in the classroom (or elsewhere). For this reason it was decided to focus this interview on *savoirs, savoir comprendre and savoir apprendre/savoir faire*. Texts which were more demanding in terms of the ethnocentric perspectives would have to be explained and participants would be asked, once again, to mediate between conflicting interpretations of a situation, fairly common in the life of a university student abroad. All these would involve more complex skills than those needed for the first series of interviews.

In addition, there was some further questioning on topics and literary texts studied during the second year. Finally, a list of topics, which had been offered in the Questionnaire, before they had started the course, was offered again. This time, the task was to identify ten topics which, in hindsight, they would consider important to study if they were planning to become sojourners in France, where they would need to understand the people and their way of life.

5.4.1 Improvements in Intercultural Competencies

As the research project was designed to discover whether students would acquire intercultural competencies as a result of Advanced level studies, some method had to be found to measure such acquisitions. It was decided to choose texts, which, as far as possible, demanded intercultural competencies calling upon representations of historical and geographical space, and social identity in the British context, as the subjects had already been explored in the first two stages. In the French context it was possible to find a text which would require some knowledge of education, regional identity, with some political and administrative references familiar to French people. It was evidently impossible to make judgements on the basis of common ground covered by all participants, as they were from different institutions. The choice of topic was therefore governed by the choices made in connection with the curriculum development project (Byram,

Morgan et al:1994). This was a rather arbitrary decision, but it did allow a point of comparison with other groups of students who had followed an Advanced level course. Successful interpretation of these two texts would lead to the conclusion that skills of interpreting and relating (built upon increased knowledge) had improved during the two-year period. Similarly a more difficult mediation task, which would imply knowledge of social practices within the French Higher Education system, was chosen.

5.4.1.1. *Savoirs /Savoir Comprendre*

(a) Identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins

The first activity chosen for the third and final interviews was similar to that adopted in the first stage interviews, in that it concerned a study of two documents, one referring to their own culture and one concerning France. Participants were asked to pick out any words or phrases which would be unfamiliar to a foreign reader. The first text, an extract from Sons and Lovers (D.H. Lawrence) presented a number of difficulties which were not present in the Bryson text. These were;

(a) The fact that the text was situated in the earlier part of the century (past)

This would be evinced by references to *earning twenty shillings a week, threepennyworth of hot cross buns, apprenticed as an electrician*

(b) It concerned a region (provincial setting) which was not their own

Nottingham, sharp wind blowing out of Derbyshire, Pennine Chain, jumble of roofs and red house ends, Congregational Chapel

(c) References to a particular social class, its religious, working and leisure practices

Whistling and sawing in the yard, Good Friday = hot cross buns/walk (rather than Church attendance) immense luxury.....lying in bed just beyond the ordinary time on a weekday, unwashed, sitting in their shirtsleeves (painting, reading indicating aspirations towards a higher social class)

The second text required

(a) A more detailed knowledge of the French education system, in particular its links with the state forged at the time of Jules Ferry; the habit of striking for better conditions.

That rotten teaching profession, which isn't even up to the level of television quiz games, strikes, holidays, we used to learn the names

(b) An understanding of the structures and administration of the French power system, and the traditionally centralised nature of government

Get them used to government authority, role of the prefect, prefectures, sub prefectures, great fan of capitals, departments

(c) Recent movements towards more regional autonomy and the contrast between these and French establishment attitudes, as represented by the newspaper *Le Monde*

Efforts of minority groups to gain some dignity, making fun of the Occitans, Le Monde

5.4.1.2 Interpreting Sons and Lovers (Lawrence)

Table 5.4.a Summary of Responses – Lawrence

Word or Phrase Mentioned	Number of Times Mentioned
Shillings, pennyworth, old money	9
Hot Cross Buns	6
Identification of the region	5
Good Friday	4
Housing	3
Unwashed	2
Lack of television, past times	1

It was evident that, apart from a dialect word (kested) the participants had understood the text on a superficial level. 'Old money' and a distinctive traditional food were the most obvious elements and were mentioned spontaneously by the majority. Some attempts were made to give a regional situation, but in most cases the historical aspects were not drawn out. No comparisons were made between the celebration of Good Friday in Britain and

elsewhere and no references were made to social class distinctions. As evidence from elsewhere in the data would indicate, literary texts are not generally analysed as a source of cultural information. It is perhaps not surprising that so little information was forthcoming. It might have been possible to draw out more information from the participants by skilful questioning at this stage, but as they were very near the point of sitting their exams it was decided not to do this. The tentative conclusion reached from this section of the interview was that participants did not have a sufficiently broad knowledge of social and historical aspects of their own culture to explain 'literary' (compared with more accessible, popular, modern) texts to a French person. The implications of this will be discussed at the end of this chapter and in the final chapter.

5.4.1.2 Interpreting a translated text Je Suis une Truie qui Doute (Duneton)

As in the case of the first text, it seemed to be important not to give participants the impression that their knowledge about France was defective, by extending the questioning when expected answers were not forthcoming. The original French text was translated into English to avoid differences in linguistic skills of participants affecting the data. More extended questioning might have provided more detailed answers, but it might also have made participants feel inadequate, at a time when they needed to feel confident about their abilities. The results will not be tabulated, as the only word mentioned spontaneously by all participants was *Le Monde* (newspaper or magazine) Instead, commentaries on key phrases will be given where appropriate and attributed to the individual speaker

(a) French education system -

The reference to the strikes and holidays about the schools.....The importance about the old style of education and what the new style was.
(G03F – 3)

You would probably have to explain what the schooling was to what it is like now. (G05F – 3)

Only the first comment here indicated that the speaker was aware of the need to explain some historical background to the French education system.

(b) Government structures and administration -

Prefectures and sub-prefectures...they like control the town. Departments, different areas in France, they are just like our counties (A26F - 3)

The prefect is a bit like the mayor isn't he? Just the different attitude the French person has, about knowing who is in charge and all the different capitals Towns and councils and stuff.

Does that surprise you, tie in with what you already found out about France?

I didn't really know that - because in this country people don't really care. I just assumed it was the same in France (A31F - 3)

Then you've got the system of how they delegate the country..prefectures and the communes (D127M - 3 house in France)

explain the order of power in the various regions, the authorities, why there are always riots (sic) the idea of discipline in French society (G03F - 3)

I don't think an English person would know anything about chief towns or Departments (D122M - 3)

Department.....makes me think of a department store (G02F - 3)

You would have to explain about how the government gives power to each part of France, each department and chief towns (I don't know what a prefecture is) (G04F - 3)

Apart from two of the participants (one of whom spent holidays in the family home in Normandy) the impression given by the responses was that the topic of government and administration had not been studied at this stage. Here, the concept of 'geographical space' included administration of that space (department, prefecture). Thus it was a more complex definition than the one which had been assumed in the second interview when participants had simply been asked to divide France into regions.

One reason for this lack of information may be that course books tend to emphasise sociocultural and topical subjects, which are thought to be more relevant to the interests of young learners. Three participants, at different times, commented that the course was not really concerned with France. One remarked:

We didn't do anything about that (France), I mean anything, French politics and things. I don't even know if I could tell you who the President is in France. It is a president, isn't it? You see, I'm not even sure about that. (C110F – 3)

The above participant had earlier mentioned the question of different values held by her peers and their French counterparts. Her response, among other relevant comments and information revealed by the data, emphasises the fact that fundamental cultural differences are only occasionally discussed at this stage. In this context it is relevant to mention the fact that the participants were asked to 'revisit' the list of 30 possible topics which had appeared in the original questionnaire and tick the 10 they thought most important for understanding French people and their way of life. In the table below topics which were ticked five or more times have been listed. It is worth noting that nobody had considered 'values and beliefs' very important when they were first asked to evaluate 30 topics at the time of answering the questionnaire, but that nine out of ten later changed their view. The increased maturity of the participants at the end of their course probably accounts for this change. However, the fact that values and beliefs do not seem to feature as a component of Advanced Level French courses or examination syllabuses may be significant here.

Table 5.4.b Important Topics for Understanding French Culture

Topic	No. of times ticked
8. Values and beliefs	9
6. Social problems common to both countries.	9
1. The way young people live	8
5. School and University life	7
11. Jobs people do, work routines	6
12. Work problems, unemployment,	6
16 Social class differences, attitudes	6
17 Festivals and celebrations	5

These results only concern a small number of students of French and cannot therefore be considered to be representative. However, it is interesting to see that the topics chosen correspond in many respects to those chosen for the curriculum development project (Byram and Morgan et al. 1994).

5.4.2 *Savoir Faire* Mediate between Conflicting Interpretations

The final mediation task which was carried out at the end of the interview was designed to be more demanding than the one which had concerned a more limited experience of life and French society at the time of the first interview. A specific situation was presented (4.7.4.2.) and participants were asked to give explanations and advice to show that they could demonstrate *savoirs and savoir faire* in order to simulate a task which would

(g) use in real time knowledge, skills and attitudes for mediation between interlocutors of one's own and a foreign culture.

According to the literature on the teaching of intercultural competencies (Byram 1997, Byram & Morgan 1994, Steele & Suozzo 1996) the student at this stage might be expected to know about the following:

(a) Culture shock as a psychological state. That is to say the advisor would recognise the depression experienced by his/her colleague as a natural stage and would be able to help the person to move towards the next stage of his intercultural experience

(b) French university life as experienced by most students. That is to say that the acquisition of a qualification is the main aim of the experience. Students do not expect to spend long periods socialising in pubs and at parties in order to cement relationships, which may continue into adult life. There is generally no system in place to encourage the social development of students, which compares to the colleges and student unions found in Britain

(c) Parents are legally obliged to support their children through the whole education process. In turn, most young adults continue to focus at least a part of their lives round the home and family.

(d) Most French people are sensitive to the fact that English is a global language, and feel strongly that their own language and culture are threatened. Visitors

should recognise this fact and make an effort to practise and improve their French.

(e) Attitudes of openness and curiosity about the foreign culture will enable 'Mark' to move on towards the next stage of his experience.

Results

(a) None of the participants mentioned culture shock. Although the expression has moved from its specialised realm into the language of the media, it was not used by the participants. Although four of the group had taken part in short exchange visits, there was no mention of depression as a natural stage, although one participant mentioned the fact that his hopes might have been unrealistic in the first place;

Perhaps he had too optimistic an idea of the French, that he was going to go over and be welcomed and everything (G03F - 3)

(b) Two of the participants understood that social life in French universities was different to that found in Britain, although only one mentioned the importance of study:

French people don't so much just pop off down the pub now and again, and so they would have other things to do, or they would probably study. They probably take it more seriously than English people do in their universities. (G04F - 3)

(c) There were five participants who assumed that it would be normal for French students to return home at the weekend. Only one participant was able to explain this in cultural terms and to link it with the lack of social events:

There is no one at the hall of Residence, because people will go home at weekends. They go back to their families. Social events, social areas that kind of thing, it's not really seen in provincial France (A26F - 3)

(d) It was evident that this task proved to be interesting to the participants as they all answered thoughtfully. All advised 'Mark' to use his French in order to improve his relationships with his French colleagues, a fact which indicates that participants were aware of French sensitivities on this matter.

It cannot be concluded from the data, however, that all the participants had made marked improvements in their intercultural skills after their studies. Replies were sensible and thoughtful but, in the end, similar to those which might have been expected at the beginning of the course. Once again, those who had experienced an exchange visit, together with classroom study about university life were able to give more detailed analysis of the problem and offer advice. We might suppose that an intercultural studies course would have ensured that students were more aware of the implications of the sojourner role, and the difficulties, which could be experienced in adjustment to another culture.

In the first four sections of this chapter data from the participants has been analysed in order to provide insights into the learning process, both inside and outside the classroom. Before summarising the results in terms of each *savoir*, reference will now be made to the interviews which were carried out with seven of the eight teachers in the summer of 1997, half way through the course. The aim of these interviews was to provide further insights into the subject of the study and, if possible to link information gained from students with that gained from teachers.

5.5 The Teacher Interviews

Do teachers expressly hope that their students will gain intercultural competencies as a result of their studies? At the time the interviews were conducted the precise term was not used, but questions were asked about the teaching of culture in any sense of the word as interpreted by the interviewee. The question of attitudes in general was also touched upon, and teachers were asked whether they thought their students could be taught to mediate in a foreign language context.

All the teachers expressed the opinion that the ideal way to understand a foreign culture was by immersion in a visit or exchange. (An example was also given, however, of a student who had retained very negative attitudes from her exchange visit which her teachers were trying to counteract in class). At a voluntary aided rural/urban comprehensive, most students took part in exchange

visits to two countries and teachers built upon this knowledge in class. It was also clear from topics mentioned by participants that these teachers used news items about Britain from the French media, a fact which may have helped students to consider an alternative view of their own society.

A particularly striking example of this, described by the teacher concerned as 'hilarious', 'mind bending' and 'embarrassing' was a French television news broadcast of an English family watching the celebrated 1996 Panorama television programme, where the Princess of Wales was interviewed. This was a specific example of the way in which cultural learning can take place when students become outsiders to their own culture, participating in the critical view of others. It was evident from the teacher's tone of voice and use of language that her students had experienced a certain amount of shock when seeing an iconic figure in their own society through the mirror of firstly a typical British family, and secondly the critical gaze of the French television camera. She said:

The embarrassment factor of watching this whole family, from father down to little kid, just totally mesmerised by Diana on Panorama – I can't think of any comment on British society that was more embarrassing ...they couldn't believe that was the point of view that the French had chosen to film. (G2)

This approach, referred to by Zarate as *regards croisés* (1986:124-7) is an example of effective classroom preparation, for the position of sojourner in a foreign country. Here, through skilful use of the media, learners were obliged to adopt an alternative point of view, without being forced to do so by the teacher.

At another institution, a city comprehensive, it was very rare to have upper secondary students who had not visited France. Here, both teachers said that they did not encounter negative attitudes as their students were, to a large extent Francophile. A similar point was made by the teacher at a private school, whose students had all been abroad, usually to France. He thought that to learn French culture was to:

Adopt some of the traditions and the habits, and maybe to try some of the different food – immerse yourself in what being a French person is like (D1)

The city comprehensive teachers mentioned *'building up knowledge about another culture'*, *'appreciating differences between things British and things French'*, *'insight into the way of life of another culture'*, *not just from home life but artistic culture in cinema, dance, music'*. The both mentioned 'tolerance' in the context of desirable attitudes and one qualified this with

Positive attitudes, acceptance of things that are different from your own way of living (A2)

In the circumstances mentioned above it seemed that teachers could take positive attitudes for granted in their small, well motivated teaching groups. In contrast, teachers at a further education institution in a new town were struggling to attract and retain their students. Both teachers here said that most of their students were attached to their 'cosy' home culture and reluctant to visit France. However, their aims as teachers were similar to those of their colleagues. One said he aimed to:

Foster certain values of tolerance, understanding and empathy for people who don't think exactly like you do. (J1)

His colleague, a Belgian national, also thought that immersion by means of a visit was the ideal method to understand a culture. However, he did not see himself as a representative of French culture, rather an ambassador for Europe:

You help yourself to European culture and you try to open these young people to that kind of attitude – it is there for the taking, it's available, it's fascinating. (J2)

At this institution students spent the first year on a course for business purposes and proceeded to Advanced level in the following year. Teaching was mainly oriented to passing the examination and not to teaching about aspects of French life which students would not expect to meet. It was evident that these teachers could not count on the positive attitudes which were largely taken for granted by their colleagues elsewhere.

However, it was difficult in all the institutions to gain relevant data on the subject of *savoirs*, that is to say the knowledge needed by learners at this level which would offer a foundation for intercultural competencies. The teachers were very

concerned that their students should be well prepared for their examinations, where such knowledge would not, at that time, be rewarded. All but one were teaching to the NEAB (now AQA) syllabus, which allowed a wider choice of texts and topics than some other boards. This seemed to encourage teachers to choose issues which might appear on the essay paper, or which would encourage students to express opinions, rather than to inform their students about aspects of French society. The question of topic choice will be discussed further in the final chapter.

All teachers were asked whether they thought their students would be able to mediate in certain situations. Very similar responses were received to this question, as teachers were largely of the opinion that it would depend upon the maturity and linguistic skills of the individual student.

In Section **4.5.3** it has already been stated that data from teachers were not very rich and informative, because the interviews themselves were not sufficiently structured. However, it is clear that teachers here did see themselves as instrumental in forming positive attitudes, either through the medium of visits and exchanges, or through some of their classroom activities. Given the importance of linguistic progress and high grades at this stage, it was hardly surprising that other aspects of their role as cultural intermediaries receded into the background. There was not a great deal of evidence from the participants which linked their responses directly to explanations or other evidence of teacher input, but this does not necessarily mean that they were not present. It may have been the case that participants forgot to link their responses with learning which had taken place in the presence of a teacher, either inside or outside the classroom. Where the links were clearly made, as in the case of participant A26F, and others who have not been quoted directly, the teacher seems to have provided the structured support necessary for effective schemata change to take place, an aspect of language teaching which was discussed in detail in Section **2.2.3**.

5.6 Summary and Comment

What conclusions can be drawn as a result of this analysis? Can we be confident that the original hypothesis is correct and that the study of foreign language in upper secondary school will lead to the acquisition of intercultural competencies? Under heading of five different *savoirs*, this section will review the definitions and summarise the evidence obtained. In the first place this evidence will concern the existence of the *savoir*, as discovered from the data and in the second place any development which appears to have taken place over the two-year period. Problems which arose with the framework itself and the methodology adopted will also be discussed.

5.6.1 Concerning *Savoir être*

Evidence from the pre-entry questionnaire and from the interviews would seem to support the assumption that upper secondary language learners, in the main, begin their course of study with appropriate attitudes. It would seem from the questionnaire that nearly all those who choose to further their language studies (as well as over 50% of those who intend to study something else at Advanced level) do have attitudes of curiosity and openness and are willing to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness. The overwhelming majority of those who answered the questionnaire had, in fact, experienced travel abroad, and this might have been a contributory factor. It may also be the case that the shock experienced by the individual who moves between multiple realities, as described by Berger and Luckmann (1966:35) is attenuated by increased travel, access to the media and the awareness of globalisation. That is to say that young people who grow up with ready access to multiple realities are under the impression that the experience of living in another country would not be problematic. This might be even more so in the case of young people who intend to move on to Advanced level study, as they are likely to have travelled abroad for holiday purposes and probably have access to various media. This point will be pursued in the final chapter.

In the same context, it is interesting to note that two participants, who showed a certain unease with the concept of difference and engagement with otherness, (a

fact which was elicited at the time of the first interview), had dropped the study of French by the time of the second interview. All the other participants were positive about French people and seemed disposed to live and work in France, although one or two were a little hesitant. It would have been interesting to discover whether this early openness and curiosity was maintained until the end of the course. This should have been elicited at the final interview, although it might have been difficult, due to the fact that participants were, in general rather tired and tense, preoccupied with their approaching examinations.

The responses obtained during the data collection largely confirmed impressions, from other sources, that foreign language students were interested in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of phenomena in their own and French culture. Indeed, there was evidence to support the view that learners create such frameworks for their new knowledge in order to carry out interpretations and are sometimes aware that their perceptions of others might be distorted by preconceptions. The fact that this process is not made more explicit in the language classroom could be a source of confusion, or disillusionment for students. The effect produced on students by an Advanced level syllabus, which concentrates almost entirely on topics related to 'social problems' will be discussed in the final chapter.

Almost all were willing to spend a period of residence abroad. It also seemed that they were willing to interact closely with the target culture (e.g., in an exchange visit), although only four had had an opportunity to do so. These four also showed themselves more willing than the others to engage in the conventions and rites of communication and interaction. However, the fact that the others were more cautious does not necessarily indicate unwillingness to interact, rather lack of successful experience upon which to base a judgement.

As Advanced Level French syllabuses are not designed with the aim of teaching *savoir être*, it is hardly surprising that it was difficult to find conclusive evidence that students reached higher levels at the end of the course, as a result of their studies. Although evidence from the teachers shows that concern to foster

positive attitudes underpinned their teaching, it was difficult to find concrete evidence of classroom activities which had been designed with this aim in mind.

Some evidence of improvement in skills, however, was noticeable among those who had taken part in exchanges earlier in their school lives. (None of them had an exchange between the two upper secondary years). For example, the fullest explanations for the difficulties experienced by 'Mark' were given by those who had undertaken an exchange visit in lower secondary school, four years before the date of their interview. It is possible that there is a certain amount of 'tacit knowledge' acquired during exchanges and visits, which can be activated at a later date, as well as in the course of class work. It was not possible to explore this point in depth during the project, but the impression gained was that both exchanges and, to a lesser but significant extent, holidays and study visits had been very beneficial. This fact would, however, imply that students who did not benefit from these experiences could be considered to be under-privileged.

It was also noted during informal conversations with the teachers that the exchange group were predicted (and gained) grades A and B. It is possible that their linguistic progress influenced their attitudes and made them more confident in situations requiring intercultural skills. Thus, in this small sample linguistic and intercultural skills were both high. A larger study might reveal differences between linguistic and intercultural skills. Certainly, in my own experience of teaching French I sometimes encountered individuals whose *savoir être* was high, even though their linguistic skills were weak.

There was some evidence that individuals who were most responsive in the interviews and who seemed to show evidence of higher than average competencies, were also willing to question values and presuppositions in their own environment. Such evidence is admittedly slight, but it was offered spontaneously in the course of the interviews. That is to say, participants were not encouraged by the questioning to criticise their own society. Therefore, when they did so, it was on the basis of their own reflections. We might suppose, therefore, that some students at this level would be capable of the skills defined as *savoir s'engager*.

The combination of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews proved to be more effective in gathering evidence for the existence of *savoir être* among participants than had been expected. Not all the objectives listed by Byram (3.6.1) could be explored effectively through these means, as a theoretical willingness or readiness is not always carried through in action. It is also the case that French is considered to be difficult at this level and is therefore likely to attract those who are well motivated, with pleasant prior experiences of the country. However, enough data were obtained to lead to further reflections on teaching and assessment, which will be discussed in the final chapter.

It is debatable whether *savoir être*, should form part of an assessment system, as it is evidently difficult to judge individuals in this respect, a fact which has already been discussed in Chapter 3 (3.4.6 and 3.6.2). In the English education system at present, where subject choice is limited and French is considered to be difficult, it seems that it is a basic requirement for success. However, in the European context, where most upper secondary students pursue their language studies, it might be a relevant part of an assessment framework. Could we imagine circumstances in which a student was debarred from or failed an intercultural studies course, because s/he failed to demonstrate evidence of *savoir être*?

Byram suggests the use of a portfolio, which might not require the student to demonstrate anything more than a theoretical stance. Perhaps a comparison could be made here with medical students who fail to demonstrate an appropriate manner to their patients during training. If intercultural speakers are to mediate in the case of misunderstanding and dysfunction, then their role has a similar function to that of a doctor and their conduct should be judged objectively, when it is appropriate to do so. These considerations will be taken into account in the final chapter, when the question of assessment criteria is discussed.

5.6.2 Concerning *Savoirs*

Questions relating to knowledge proved to be the most difficult to research in this project. This was partly due to the fact that participants came from different institutions and were not all studying the same topics and texts. It was also

difficult to modify the objectives provided in Byram's framework, for a number of reasons. The definition of knowledge (3.6.1) appears at first to offer an alternative to the concept of 'educated native speaker knowledge' on the one hand and the taxonomy of sociocultural topics and 'knowledge of the world' suggested in the *Common European Framework*. However, the eleven intercultural objectives would still only be accessible to an individual with substantial cultural capital and the experience of an ethnographer. It proved difficult to adjust the objectives to the likely knowledge of a seventeen year old student of French. If this definition is to provide a threshold level of intercultural competence, it is unlikely to be attained at Advanced level, a point at which many cease to study a foreign language.

It was clear from the data that, for this sample of students at least, there were few clear concepts relating to 'collective memory' or 'national boundaries', in their own society or elsewhere. Responses were very much dependent on individual experience of travel, or a particular interest in history. Evidence relating to the processes and institutions of socialisation was also much stronger in the case of those who had taken part in exchanges or had other contact with the country. Although these findings may confirm the importance of experiential learning, they also indicate that the learning process seems to be much less structured than in the past in other areas of the curriculum. For example, history was not taught in terms of a chronological progression to these students; neither did they learn about the different regions of their own country, as used to be the case. It may be that a more structured approach to adapting the learners' schemata to new information is necessary for the development of intercultural competencies (as was suggested in Section 2.2.3). Whether this involves the acquisition of substantial new knowledge or not is open to question and further research.

One interesting finding from the research project, for example, was the readiness with which participants took on an alternative perspective, in particular where they felt confident to do so. They were also able to draw upon a small amount of knowledge (as in the case of the French Revolution 5.2.3.1) to reflect and compare. Is it possible that their familiarity with a variety of differences from

their everyday lives, through foreign travel, television and other media has enabled them to access 'multiple realities' to a much greater extent than previous generations? They are, in fact, the children of 'late modernity' (Giddens 1990), whose socialisation has included access to 'otherness', through communications, travel and the media to an extent undreamed of fifty years ago. At the end of *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann define, perhaps prophetically, a society in which discrepant worlds are generally available on a market basis. They say that

There will be an increasingly general consciousness of the relativity of *all* worlds, including one's own, which is now subjectively apprehended as *a* world, rather than *the* world (authors' emphasis) (1966:192)

If this assumption is generally true for upper secondary students, we might suppose that they would readily envisage the possibility of work or study in another country, without being aware of the problems they would encounter. It might also imply that preparation for the role of sojourner would not be difficult, provided that theory and practice were suitably reconciled. What are the implications therefore as far as Byram's definition and the needs of teachers and learners are concerned?

It seems that the question concerns the structuring of knowledge. Let us return to the discussion on schemata in Chapter 2 and the definition of the intercultural speaker and the Third Place as defined by Kramsch at the end of that chapter, together with her comparison between a 'structuralist and post-structuralist view of intercultural competence (1999:43). If it is indeed the case that thirdness is constructed through dialogue where communication is

The relational making of signs, the responsive construction of self, and the interdependence of opposites. (1999:43)

there is an obvious link between an interest in 'otherness' which is based on intercultural dialogue, constructed through encounter with others and the 'post-structuralist' arguments. Learners could be enabled to construct thirdness, by 'perceiving continuity in events, identifying patterns and making generalisations' (ibid:44). However, there is always the danger that this process would lead to an

increase in stereotyping, instead of cultural understanding and this question will be further discussed in the final chapter.

A possible interpretation of Kramersch's distinction between a structuralist and post-structuralist approach is that European societies in this respect are traditional, homogeneous and symmetrical and that definitions of intercultural competence have to take account of this. In terms of the project, definitions of *savoirs*, helped to uncover the gaps in participants' cultural knowledge. They may also have had other information which was not accessed at the time due to faults in the methodology or data collection process. More research is necessary in this area in order to establish some norms in this respect. It would seem that, if definitions of intercultural competence are to be produced at this level, there must be a better match between theory and practice as represented by the world of the learner.

The challenges involved in preparing language learners for their role in the European Union of the future are already complex and cannot always be reconciled with global issues. Analysis of the data obtained, however, indicates a greater flexibility on the part of some students with regard to taking alternative perspectives (for example) than might be expected from the literature. This flexibility might be found widely in the population, or it might be that upper secondary languages students differ in this respect than their peers.

5.6.3 Concerning *Savoir Comprendre*

This *savoir* is a key factor in the reassessment of the role and function of the foreign language learner, which is suggested in this thesis. The search for appropriate texts to use in the context of the semi-structured interviews proved to be an interesting exercise. It was also evident that participants enjoyed the process, and were in some cases able to distinguish between images created from the imagination, stimulated by literature and presented for consumption to a reading/viewing public and the complexity and variety of everyday existence particularly in the Bryson and Mayle texts, where there were fewer difficulties. In particular, their comments, relating to 'insider' and 'outsider' views of a

culture were very perceptive and are further evidence of their ability to engage with multiple realities, taking on alternative perspectives. There was also evidence to suppose that the activity had offered a learning experience to the participants.

In the second interviews, theories which had been developed in recent years and tested mainly on older (tertiary level) students (Neuner 1997:57-8), were applied to upper secondary sector. In Stage 2, the opportunity to provide French and English definitions of similar concepts had proved to a thought-provoking activity, indicating that more sophisticated skills in this area might be developed. The first category of words (5.3.5.1), involving simple basic knowledge of cultural difference offered very little difficulty. A second category (5.3.5.2), requiring the ability to interpret at a deeper level, depended on the concept having been taught or upon experience. It was evident at the time, once again, that participants enjoyed the experience of reflecting upon differences in this straightforward way. The activity was successful in that it allowed for a better understanding of this competence and some indication as to how it might be improved.

During the third interview stage the task was to discover whether competence had improved over the period. The texts chosen to assess development may have been inappropriate, in the event. The level of difficulty in terms of the home and target culture, as far as providing opportunities to explain ethnocentric perspectives, may have been too great. Criteria were applied to the choice which assumed that intercultural competencies may have been taught, in the sense that the texts touched upon aspects which had formed part of the Durham project (social identity, education, power and politics). As there was no indication that these topics had been taught in class, it was, perhaps arbitrary to attempt to assess them informally. However, given the fact that the original research question had to be based on the assumption that intercultural competencies would be found and would improve in line with linguistic competencies, there was little alternative but to find a more difficult task, than had been provided in the first stage. Ability to interpret correctly will inevitably depend upon background

knowledge about the society concerned. Thus we return to the dilemma of defining appropriate *savoirs* for a particular group of learners.

Did the methodology adopted translate Byram's objectives (3.6.1) effectively? Once again, although the tasks which were chosen led to some conclusions with regard to the disposition of learners, they were difficult and complex at the final stage. It was not possible to say that this competence had improved during the course from the evidence obtainable through the method chosen. This may either indicate a weakness in the methodology or the fact that this competency need to be taught and cannot be acquired simply through language learning. The latter explanation seems the most likely of the two.

5.6.4 Concerning *Savoir apprendre/faire*

The ability to acquire new knowledge and to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction, according to the objectives as defined in 3.6.1 was not really possible to judge through the medium of the interview. It was likely that those who had given the most thoughtful and perceptive replies to questions, and those who had gained skills during their visits to France, would be most successful at putting this into practice in fieldwork or role play. There were two points, one during the first and one during the third interview when participants were questioned on the steps they would take to resolve a difficulty which involved intercultural misunderstanding. This was as near as it was possible to get to a mediation task.

What evidence could be discovered which would indicate the ability to identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction and mediate between conflicting interpretations? Evidence for this competence was sought during the first interview and again in the third, with increase in difficulty entailed in the complexity of the task and extent of knowledge needed to carry it out.

In the first interview it was clear that those who had experienced an exchange were at an advantage, in that they had been through some processes of negotiation and compromise. They were much more likely to envisage a difficulty and provide a solution. The others, however, largely demonstrated the

ability to speculate and use any available experience of 'otherness' in order to offer a solution. In the third interview it was evident that exchange experience together with knowledge of the education system, offered a basis for development of the skill. However, there was little evidence that the other participants had acquired the skills they would need in order to operate successfully as sojourners in France, or to help others to improve their intercultural competencies. It is not possible to be categorical with regard to the benefits of exchange visits, as the negative effects of earlier unsuccessful visits are unlikely to be found among upper secondary students who have opted to continue their language studies.

Evidently the methods chosen in respect of this part of Byram's framework were inadequate in that they did not include action research in the field. In different circumstances, one could imagine the possibility of preparing young people for an overseas experience and then carrying out research on their competencies during their period of work or study *in situ*. There seems no reason why the teaching of mediation skills should not be included in an intercultural learning programme, however, as it is evidently relevant to the needs and aspirations of language learners and this will be discussed in the final chapter

5.7 The Trustworthiness of the Study

To what extent is it possible to say that the study is trustworthy in the sense that it has fulfilled its objectives to provide valid evidence concerning the intercultural competencies of upper secondary learners of French? To what extent are any deficiencies due to methodology and fieldwork, rather than the framework itself as an appropriate structure for the study? Has the study proved that intercultural competencies are acquired during the learning of French at this stage or not? It is not possible to answer such questions in full, as not all evidence is conclusive. However, some general points will be made before the wider issues are discussed in the final chapter.

It was pointed out in Chapters 1 and 2 that the content of foreign language courses in upper secondary school is intended to introduce learners to the society

in question, but that assessment systems were not at present designed to discover whether this aim was achieved or not. Research in foreign language learning at this level largely concerns linguistic skills, which are easy to assess, as definitions in terms of native speaker competence are relatively simple to agree. In this study difficulties concerned not only the definition of competencies to be studied but also the fact that there could not be clear agreement from the start between researcher and participants as to the competencies which were being studied. As the research aims did not coincide with what was assessed in their examinations, the aims of the researcher might not always have been clear to the participants. Although this meant that interviews were more relaxed and open than if linguistic skills had been under discussion, participants were at a slight disadvantage in that they were questioned on aspects of their course which were not normally discussed. It must be concluded, however, from the bulk of the evidence that intercultural competencies of the participants were not systematically improved over the period.

However, there was evidence that experiential learning in the shape of exchanges and all kinds of visits had encouraged the development of such competencies. In addition it was likely that some activities and explanations provided by teachers were helpful in enabling students to view their own culture from a French perspective, as in Section 5.5 , and also where a teacher had explained the context of La Peste. An unexpected finding was the flexibility encountered in some individuals and their willingness to take alternative perspectives on their own culture. Details of these will be discussed in the recommendations section in the final chapter.

In respect of fieldwork, there is always the possibility at the end of an interview that the reality of others might have been misrepresented by failures in interviewing technique, lack of time available or simple misunderstandings. It is very likely, for example, that participants had more knowledge about France than was revealed by the data. On the other hand, it was also clear that the interviews allowed the possibility of drawing on their knowledge and using it creatively. The interviews and assessment activities were also constrained by the fact that

they would be analysed within Byram's (1997b) framework. Although this was considered to be essential in terms of offering a contribution to the research field, it might also have meant that other data were ignored in the process. The original intention of the study had been to explore the question of learners' access to the target language culture in a more open manner and to attempt to theorise on the basis of the data. However, the decision to adopt a framework for the study was linked to a concern to make a contribution, however small, to research in progress. Therefore to use an available framework, such as that provided by the CEF or by Byram, seemed to be a more constructive approach. A closer study of a smaller number of students might have produced richer data, but would have been very difficult to undertake unobtrusively.

Difficulties were encountered and have been discussed in this section and at the end of Chapter 4. However, methods which explore the learning process from the perspective of the learners' reality are irreplaceable, even though they are often unsatisfactory from the theorists' point of view. The study has provided some insight into the strengths and weaknesses of a small group of learners in terms of their intercultural competencies and their potential to take alternative perspectives on their own culture. Within this small group it has been possible to study in some depth the impact of their learning experiences inside and outside the classroom. The fact that this information was gathered directly from the learners themselves, rather than from their teachers constitutes an original aspect of this study. Literature in the field of intercultural competencies to date has largely concentrated upon the effects of specific programmes of study (as in Byram and Morgan et al 1994) or a specific activity over a period of time. A qualitative study of the current situation ought to be helpful in forming a basis from which to effect some changes, either in teacher training or in syllabus design.

Summary and Conclusion to this Chapter

The concern of this chapter has been to present an analysis of the data which represents as clear a picture as possible of the participants in this study. The questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews allowed access to some

information which is not normally obtained from students at this stage, notably that concerning *savoir être*.

Similarly, information relating to *savoirs* had little connection with the knowledge which is normally acquired at this stage. This is either linguistic or related to specific topics or texts, designated by the syllabus. It was unfortunate that the participants were mainly studying literary topics. For this reason some comments in the conclusions are made on the basis of my own experience as an examiner of topic based courses.

Analysis has been made above of the various difficulties which were encountered with the framework itself. The main criticism of the framework from the point of view of this study is that it makes substantial demands on the learner, especially in terms of *savoirs*. If this framework is to be used with those who are preparing for their first period of overseas work or study, adjustments will have to be made in order to take account of social and educational realities which limit the potential of most individuals to become 'intercultural speakers' as described in Byram (1997b). There is an inherent contradiction in the fact that the framework rejects a 'culture of the elite' at the same time as it sets some standards which could only normally be achieved by a member of the elite.

In the final chapter the main points of the thesis will be summarised with reference to the literature and conclusions will be drawn which relate to the field of foreign language teaching and assessment. Further issues relating to problems and possibilities which have been uncovered by the research will also be discussed and some suggestions and recommendations will be made in conclusion.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

In this final chapter, I will return, in the first instance, to the original proposition of this thesis; that is to say, that upper secondary learners of French should acquire intercultural competencies as a result of their language learning during the two-year study period. At the end of the previous chapter there is a summary of the evidence for the existence of such competencies, for the dispositions which learners might possess, and an evaluation of their progress over the two-year period. It was clear that, although they did not systematically acquire and develop intercultural competencies, as defined by Byram (1997b), there were a number of findings from the data which offered evidence as to the participants' potential in this respect. This evidence will be used in this final chapter to justify the inclusion of intercultural competencies in a programme of study, which is subsequently assessed.

At the beginning of the chapter, there will be reference to the literature in the field which proved to be particularly helpful, and the contribution of this study will be situated within the field. Its limitations will be discussed and there will also be some reflections on the research process itself, the difficulties which arose, and the compromises which had to be made. It will also point out the advantages which are offered by a small-scale research project. In the sections which follow, conclusions will be drawn in relation to the development of intercultural learning in the secondary school learning context. A three-stage development model, leading to the status of intercultural speaker will be proposed in the context of the British educational system.

There will also be some recommendations and some suggestions for the teaching and assessment of intercultural competencies. The aim would be to enable learners to acquire a number of *savoirs* or intercultural competencies, which can be viewed as an integral part of their language learning, and assessed as such. This section will question a number of assumptions, which at present guide those responsible for syllabus design and assessment, and propose instead a more flexible system.

Each *savoir* will be examined, with reference to the conclusions reached at the end of the data analysis. Suggestions will be made for some innovations in the Advanced Level foreign language syllabus, which would integrate intercultural and linguistic competencies. These suggestions will also spring from experience gained in the field of teaching over some twenty-five years and in examining during the last five years. This section will also include some details of proposed assessment activities in which both elements figure, together with descriptors of the intercultural competencies involved. Although native speaker linguistic competence might continue to be a personal goal for some learners, it would be replaced by the concept of intelligibility in the descriptors.

6.1 The Background to the Research Project

There were several reasons why this project was undertaken. It was, in a sense, the consequence of a number of events, all of which contributed to the decision to change and reduce my role in the teaching of foreign languages and to study and reflect upon theoretical aspects of language teaching. In the first place a period spent in France on a post-to-post teacher exchange allowed me an alternative perspective on my role as a teacher in the English educational system and all that it entailed. As the exchange took place at a time when new forms of examination were being introduced, this aspect was particularly useful.

Changes in the assessment systems in lower and upper secondary schools seemed to be driven, on the one hand by instrumental reasons for language learning, and on the other by increasing reliance on technology to bring to life the language used in the classroom. Literary studies at Advanced Level were less popular with young people, who usually envisaged the use of the language skills in the workplace, even when they intended to continue into Higher Education. Course work on topics, an extended oral examination, listening comprehension tapes involving the use of a variety of native speakers, authentic texts with complex cultural references; all these innovations ensured that high standards were maintained and that only the gifted and hard working students obtained high grades. Even this minority, I noticed, were usually demoralised at the end of their course by the fact that their performance was implicitly, and sometimes explicitly compared to native speaker standards.

In 1991, the opportunity to participate in the curriculum development project, described in Byram and Morgan *et al* (1994) allowed me to develop my understanding of a number of theoretical concepts related to cultural awareness and the development of intercultural skills. By preparing and teaching a number of topics to my own students of Advanced Level French I was able to put these theories into practice. These new approaches were largely successful in their aims of developing the intercultural dimension without neglecting linguistic skills. However as examinations syllabuses continued to stress (and reward) only linguistic skills, no radical changes could be envisaged in the foreseeable future. Subsequently, the opportunity to carry out a project presented itself and it seemed logical to undertake further research into the ways in which students might acquire intercultural competencies, whether inside the classroom or through other learning experiences

6.2 The Contribution of the Literature

The thinking which underpins this thesis is drawn from a number of works on the social and anthropological nature of culture itself, the psychological and other adjustments which have to be made by those who adapt to other cultures, and the teaching and learning of foreign languages. In particular the work of three theorists and teacher educators, Kramsch, Zarate and Byram, has been essential. In this section I shall briefly review the main influences from the field of intercultural studies which influenced my project.

As was pointed out at the beginning of the thesis, there is a general presumption that those who learn a foreign language in the upper secondary sector will at some point immerse themselves more fully in the target language culture for the purposes of work or study. In the European and global context there is also a more general expectation that the learning of foreign languages not only brings practical and material benefits, but that it will contribute to building a more harmonious future on the basis of mutual understanding between nations. The intercultural dimension is firmly situated within these ideals on the one hand and the more pragmatic issues on the other. It often seems, however, that those who concern themselves with the linguistic dimension do not take into account the social and psychological pressures felt by those who approach other cultures.

In this respect the work of sociologists and anthropologists, such as Geertz, Berger and Luckmann, Keesing and Gudykunst has been helpful in exploring the foundations of ethnocentrism and the way in which social reality is generally constructed. It would have been interesting to explore the way in which modern (Western) society offers wider access to alternative realities through communications and the media and to study the effect of this upon learners. However, the scope of this research project did not allow for this aspect to be developed. In terms of the concrete psychological and social adjustments which have to be made by the individual who undertakes intercultural experience, the work of Barna and Furham and Bochner, among others, was also important. An appropriate psychological preparation, including an understanding of the way in which the individual processes new and confusing information, should form part of the foreign language learning experience at this level. In this context, the value of training in participant observation and ethnographic enquiry is twofold, allowing the learners to gain information and enter into the experience of others, while reflecting on their own culture.

There was also a substantial body of literature based on the successful practice of teaching students to adapt to other cultures, such as the work of Damen, Seelye, Valdes, Robinson, and Steele and Suozzo, among many others. Although these works did not, in general terms, make clear the distinction between learning about another culture and becoming intercultural, they did offer useful insights and advice to teachers. However, the search for theory leading to a deeper understanding of the learning processes and pedagogical practice, has been guided by the work of Kramsch, Zarate and Byram. Their theories, based on research and work with both students and teachers of foreign languages have clarified the nature of the intercultural learning experience and provided a sound background upon which to examine a particular aspect of the question.

6.3 The Contribution of the Research Project

The aim of the research project was to contribute to the understanding of intercultural competencies. It was designed to offer some insights into the way in which a group of upper secondary students engaged, or failed to engage, with the

culture of the country whose language they were learning and bring it into relation with their own. To date, research with students at this stage has mainly focused on linguistic skills acquisition. Advice, as far as cultural learning is concerned, is offered in terms of teaching topics, using authentic materials, or overcoming stereotyped ideas. However, as there is a very strong focus on linguistic achievement, which is linked to high examination grades, the effect of this cultural teaching on the learners does not seem to receive much consideration. Although no strong claims are made for this present research, it is nevertheless authentic in that the participants are encouraged to formulate their own ideas and responses, and are given the opportunity to reflect upon their own culture in relation to 'otherness' as represented by France.

Also, the collection of data, linked to a theoretical framework, is subsequently used to formulate suggestions for the assessment of intercultural competencies. This is due to the fact that insights into students' learning processes gave rise to reflections on the ways in which it might be possible to assess such competencies. We may consider it to be unfortunate for all concerned that so much teaching is driven by assessment. However, it is difficult to make a case for radical changes of approach in teaching methods, unless the outcomes of such changes can, in some way, be measured.

6.4 The Limitations and Advantages of the Study

In Chapter 4 there were references to the various difficulties encountered by a single researcher engaged in a qualitative study. In the first place, it proved to be more difficult than expected to find and retain participants over a two-year period. Compared with students in Higher Education, who are usually located in one place and who are, themselves, being initiated into the research process, upper secondary students can prove to be elusive. They do not necessarily see the point of taking part in research, unless another adult, such as their teacher, is supportive. I was very grateful to those who did enable me to continue with the project by giving up their time to a stranger, for no visible reward. Some of their teachers were very helpful in that they encouraged their students to participate. It was unfortunate, nevertheless, to lose some participants, and with them some valuable information. It would also have been useful to follow a group of students, who were not studying a foreign

language in order to compare them with the participants, but this proved to be impossible, due to lack of response to written requests for help.

Inevitably, some participants were more confident and eloquent than others in replying to questions. Where they were having difficulty in supplying information, it was necessary to adopt an encouraging manner in order to ensure that the interview was a positive experience for them. This procedure may, at times, have distorted the responses, although the general impression gained was one of honesty and openness on their part. Care was always taken to assure participants that the interviews and assessment tasks did not touch on matters which might concern their achievements in French as an examination subject.

This fact imposed a limitation on the study, as it would have been more satisfying to link the linguistic and intercultural competencies in order to gain a better overall picture of progress. This was especially so because any changes to the Advanced level French syllabus would probably entail the integration of intercultural and linguistic competencies. However, this compromise was necessary in the interests of obtaining clearer data in relation to the focus of the study. It is evident that some further research, including action research, will be necessary in this area.

However, the informal nature of the research interviews and assessment tasks offered a number of advantages. None of the participants knew their researcher as a teacher. Neither were they required to speak or read French, as this might have distorted the results. It is not often that young people have an opportunity to discuss their work in an informal setting, without the linguistic element being predominant, and with it a certain anxiety about their own skill level. They seemed to be pleased to talk about their experiences as visitors to France, and to be able to analyse their own culture in the light of knowledge they had obtained about France and French people. The fact that they were valued as participants in a research project probably contributed to their self-esteem and encouraged them to reply thoughtfully and honestly. This was certainly the impression received at the time.

As the study was limited in scope, not all comments are based solely on the information obtained from the data. Other sources of information, apart from the literature survey have also contributed to the thinking, which has informed the

recommendations. These include twenty years of teaching French to Advanced Level at a comprehensive school and a further education college, and subsequently to adults at a similar level in the Open University. In addition, participation in the Durham curriculum development project of 1991-2 was a formative experience. Finally the experience of conducting and marking topic-based oral and written examinations over a four-year period enabled me to understand better the manner in which learners process information in order to create mental frameworks for the knowledge they encountered. Where conclusions are drawn from other sources than the study, this will be made clear. In the next section, a three-stage development model will be followed by summaries of the research findings in respect of the *savoirs*.

6.5 Intercultural Speaker Development Model

As this model is being proposed within the British educational system, its stages are linked to the age at which a foreign language is started, the option system post-16, which governs choices at upper secondary level, and the fact that language learners in Higher Education normally spend a period of six months or more in a country in which the target language is spoken. This model is therefore based upon assumptions related to the cognitive and psychological development of learners. It would be perfectly possible for an adult learner, for example, to omit the preparatory stage, as the *savoirs* related to that stage could be acquired elsewhere than in a language classroom, or be transferred from the learning of another language

6.5.1 The Preparatory Stage

This stage would involve only certain *savoirs* and *savoir être*. Learners would be encouraged to be open and curious about the target culture. This stage entails learners being introduced to the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction within the contexts of family, education, and social life in the target language communities. Although informal comparison might take place at this stage, it would not be deliberately introduced. Learners would also be introduced to the national memory of the target culture and to national definitions of geographical space, through stories, film and accounts. The foreign language might also be systematically used in other areas of the curriculum such as history and geography. Adult beginners would normally be introduced to these elements in the

sojourner stage described below, with the assumption that historical and geographical knowledge already existed or could be readily accessed.

The distinction between 'tourism' and intercultural learning, which is made by Byram and Zarate (1995:14) does not seem to be helpful in this respect. It is true that the influence of tourism has, to date, led to some unimaginative syllabuses, based on transactional language. Nevertheless, the experience of visiting a target language country offers numerous opportunities to explore historical and geographical aspects, to observe architecture and traditions, as well as to experience cuisine and observe aspects of daily life. The majority of participants in the study who had visited France seemed to have benefited from the experience, in that they showed openness and curiosity and had reflected on their experiences.

The word 'tourism' covers a wide spectrum of attitudes and behaviours. Historically it was an activity limited to a wealthy minority, who were seeking exotic experiences from 'otherness', which would confirm their own superiority. In the modern world, however, and particularly when family visits are linked with a language which is learned at school, tourism is likely to foster the beginnings of intercultural competence. Therefore, in the preparatory stage it might be better to draw these elements into the language classroom in order to lay the foundations for later stages and enable all learners to profit from them, rather than to reject them as inferior. Intercultural learning would be a development from tourism rather than a totally different experience. There was evidence from the data that participants from such culturally privileged backgrounds had gained some intercultural competencies in this way. However, those without this contact were particularly likely to rely on stereotypes from the media or form their ideas solely on the basis of a text studied in class.

6.5.2. The Sojourner Stage

This stage, which would not normally be encountered before the age of 16, would prepare the learner for intercultural speaker status, at a subsequent date, after a period of residence in a target language country. Upper secondary students, according to the data, have the potential to bring their home culture into fruitful relationship with another. Mature students, (for example at the Open University) are likely to be even more successful as they have a wider general knowledge and

experience. In this instance, Byram's objectives concerning *savoir être* would inform the pedagogic principles. The *savoirs* would inform the design of a flexible programme of study, in contexts limited by the maturity and interests of the learners. *Savoirs comprendre, apprendre* and *faire* would all be adapted to the level appropriate to the skills and experience of the learner. For the purposes of assessment, intercultural and linguistic skills would be integrated at this stage. Evidence of the fifth *savoir, savoir s'engager*, would also be found where students were taught to engage critically with their material. The practice would also be informed by theoretical knowledge relating to intercultural learning, which would be conveyed to the students. It is this stage which is developed in detail below, and which relies for its design on the longitudinal study, together with personal experience.

6.5.3 Intercultural Speaker Stage

The achievement of this status depends upon a broad understanding of both the native and target cultures and entails a period of residence in another culture, in order to carry out practice. It is not envisaged that this stage could be reached before the age of tertiary education. However, it might be attained by other methods than those encountered in the tertiary sector, such as residence in the target language country and autonomous or distance learning. It is at this stage that the fifth *savoir, savoir s'engager*, would be developed systematically in an academic institution. At this stage, it is suggested that Byram's objectives (1997b) would all be applied. This stage is not developed below, as it was never assumed that participants in the study might reach the full status of intercultural speaker.

6.6 The *Savoirs* at Sojourner Level

In the following section each *savoir* will be discussed in turn in order to draw conclusions from the study and to offer some recommendations related to pedagogical practice and assessment at sojourner level.

6.6.1 *Savoir être*

We have seen in the previous chapter that there was strong evidence for the existence of this *savoir* among the participants in the study. Indeed, the fact that French at this level is considered a very difficult option makes it highly likely that the initial

attitudes will correspond closely to Byram's definitions. There were difficulties involved in measuring evidence of progression here. Outside the portfolio/self assessment mode, already suggested by Byram, the systematic assessment of progress might be difficult. In a wider European context too, it should be noted that foreign language learning is usually obligatory in the upper secondary sector. This fact makes comparison between British students and their peers elsewhere very difficult, as the obligation to study a foreign language post-16 would entail a more representative cross-section of the school population. It would also be very difficult, on ethical grounds, to persuade teachers and assessors to make judgements, which are unrelated to other more concrete aspects. All teachers interviewed during the project distanced themselves from this idea.

Nevertheless, such a conclusion would not imply that *savoir être* should disappear from the conceptual, or theoretical framework of ICC, or that it should not be assessed as part of an end of course task. For example, it should be possible to judge whether a candidate has taken up an appropriate position (knowing how to be) in order to deal with a problem. In addition, if culture and language learning is based on theory, which involves social, psychological and neurological elements, as well as the development of cognitive skills, then *savoir être* can be considered a key concept in the theoretical underpinning of an intercultural learning.

6.6.2. *Savoirs*

This aspect of ICC proved to be difficult to research. The modification of Byram's objectives offered a structure, which did not necessarily allow participants to demonstrate all their knowledge about various aspects of French society. It might have been better to explore topic areas covered in greater depth and formulate some theories from the information gained. However, this approach would have implied a much more detailed analysis and have been even more lengthy and time-consuming than was already the case. I propose to look at this question from four angles; firstly that of the modified framework used during the project, secondly the evidence from the data, thirdly from knowledge of course books and examination answers, and finally from suggestions made by participants themselves at the end of the project.

It has been recognised in the *Common European Framework*, and elsewhere in the literature, that a definition of appropriate areas of knowledge about a foreign culture

has important implications for teachers, learners and assessors. It cannot therefore be done lightly or arbitrarily. There is a constant risk that students will be encouraged to amass facts at second hand, acquiring a stereotyped and static image of 'the other', instead of involving themselves in the dynamic processes of enquiry and comparison.

It is not surprising, given the areas questioned, and the present syllabuses, that students tended to use their knowledge gained outside the language classroom in furnishing their responses. Those who had visited France on holiday, or as an exchange partner, or who had received a broad historical education were at an advantage. The topic areas defined for pre-16 students and the approaches used in order to teach French post-16 are not necessarily conducive to the acquisition of knowledge about France or comparison with their own culture. (It should be stated, however, both the National Curriculum and GCE Advanced Level Boards include these in their aims.). The important question seems to be whether a radically different approach to present practices could be justified, and, if so, upon what grounds?

It seems from this study that *savoirs*, as defined by Byram, are acquired in a rather arbitrary way. Although participants almost certainly knew more about France at the end of two years than at the beginning, they did not seem to be very clear about their gains. Neither were they able to situate their knowledge into a framework of understanding, as was probably the case in their other subject areas. In addition, almost all of them had prepared literary texts rather than topics, and it was very rarely that these texts were regarded as a source of knowledge about French culture. Inevitably, as examinations approached, they tended to measure their progress according to linguistic competencies. Only occasionally did a participant suggest a specific example of gaining a better understanding of French society or way of life through the Advanced level course material.

As examination boards offer the possibility of studying a topic in depth, it is appropriate at this point to draw upon my experience of examining the topics, which Edexcel candidates prepare for their examination. The Edexcel Board offers candidates the opportunity to prepare a topic of their choice for the oral examination and two other contemporary topics for the written option. Experience of oral

examining over four years, has led me to reflect on the effect of such assessments on the intercultural competencies of candidates. Although the choice of subject is open and the final mark is a reflection of the skills described in the assessment criteria, the question of 'knowledge about France' displayed by the candidate can prove difficult to define and its assessment is left to the discretion of the examiner.

There are many instances in which it is clear that the 'knowledge', gained through the press or the Internet (particularly when the choice falls on a popular area, such as social problems) leads to the candidate gaining a very distorted picture of French society. Candidates frequently conflate their knowledge of their own society, gained through the media, with information gained about France. Unless they have access to trustworthy statistical information, they tend to generalise from one or two media sources. Frequently, negative hetero-stereotypes are reinforced, particularly in connection with popular topics such as crime, drugs, smoking, violence, immigration and racism. Historical, or geographical background knowledge, or an understanding of the 'processes and institutions of socialisation', cannot be taken for granted at this stage. A free choice of subject, prepared without the help of the teacher, can lead candidates to choose topics on the basis of their sensational appeal. An examiner cannot help but notice that many candidates choose oral or written topics which cover such subjects. If we suppose that this 'knowledge' becomes internalised, in the form of a cultural framework, by the learner, then the image of the target culture can become highly distorted. The consequences of acquiring fragmentary knowledge can only be damaging in terms of the development of intercultural competencies. Whether or not decisions are taken to continue studies at tertiary level or not, on the basis of impressions gained at this stage, it is impossible to say.

What recommendations could be made then, to encourage teachers and learners to adopt a more structured approach? Some would argue that, since we acquire knowledge of our own society in a gradual manner, from a variety of sources, then we should encourage students of a second and foreign culture to follow the same procedures. However, this view does not represent the reality of those who experience second language and culture learning in a classroom setting. The conclusions reached in this section of the study might also point to some reasons why students seem to encounter many difficulties in their language studies at this

level and decide not to specialise at tertiary level. The difficulties are assumed to be linguistic, but they may, in fact, be connected with the fact that understanding of the foreign culture is incoherent.

In the same way that the first language is absorbed and reproduced quite accurately by a young child, so the first culture, learned during socialisation, tends to provide a systematic framework into which new knowledge is fitted without undue questioning. It seems logical, therefore, that cultural information acquired through second language learning is best built up in a systematic manner. Although there are enough similarities between European cultures to make some aspects familiar from the start, learners should also be trained to accept and seek to understand differences between their own and another culture. This process has been defined in the literature as the ability to relativise.

As has already been noted, the ability to relativise is unlikely to exist in the pre-16 student (Byram & Morgan 1994:16-24). The greater maturity, objectivity and critical skills of the post-16 student, however, would indicate that this skill could be taught from this stage. Indeed, there was ample evidence from the data that some participants were able to do this successfully, even without training. My experience with mature students (at the Open University) confirms the fact that the mature student, with a background of general knowledge and experience is likely to be even more skilful here, than the post-16 student. Therefore, a systematic approach is suggested, which pays due attention to the processes and institutions of socialisation, and combines enough historical and geographical knowledge to encourage the ability to develop a dual perspective on both cultures. This approach would not, of course, preclude the study of some literary texts, which would complement such approaches.

A programme of study including these elements is likely to facilitate the development of intercultural competencies, because it offers a framework of knowledge, in which objective comparisons can be made and explanations can be sought. A random diet of topics, made simply on the basis of the supposed concerns of young people, may motivate in the short term, but is likely to be damaging in the long term, both to the development of intercultural competencies and to the motivation of the learner.

There are important pedagogical implications in the above recommendations, which cannot be fully developed within this thesis. None of the above could be achieved without teacher training programmes and a radical reassessment of the criteria, which govern assessments in relation to language learning. The use of the educated native speaker model has already been criticised in the literature. A corollary to such criticisms concerns the content of the language course. Do upper secondary language learners feel confident that their knowledge of the target culture, and its relation to their own, will offer a firm foundation for future studies? The data obtained during this study would suggest that this is only the case for some young people who are already privileged by reason of their personal encounters and broad general knowledge. The recommendations made above would have the effect of extending these privileges to a wider group of learners

The arguments made above for a more structured approach to the question of course content are not advocating an excessive rigidity. This would, in itself, be counterproductive, in that stereotyped pictures of a particular culture might be the result of such an approach. Concepts such as socialisation, national memory and institutions are very broad and do not preclude flexibility or the option of studying other francophone countries than mainland France, for example. However, if the main principle of preparing the student for the role of sojourner underpins the course design, then teachers, learners and assessors can be clearer in their purposes. As the next section will indicate, the intercultural speaker will have to develop other skills, which include the ability to make a personal journey into another culture. Evidence from the data indicated that a sound base of knowledge was necessary for success in these other skills.

6.6.3 *Savoir Comprendre*

The status of intercultural speaker as interpreter on the borderline between two cultures has been analysed by Kramsch and Zarate, among others in Chapter 2. Arguments are put forward within this thesis for the reconsideration of the importance of this role for the language learner. These arguments depend partly on the fact that participants demonstrated the ability and disposition to carry out this function within the limitations of their knowledge of the two cultures. It was also evident in the semi-structured interviews, that the act of interpreting documents or

events encouraged the development of intercultural skills. Participants found the tasks interesting and gained intercultural insights, through their reflections.

Although it was not possible to demonstrate improvements in competence for the majority of the group, observation and analysis of the data offered examples of the way in which interpretation, explanation and mediation would enrich the experience of learners, empowering them to interpret and mediate between others. It is appropriate to ask at this point why there is so little emphasis on interpretation and mediation, in upper secondary language learning at present?

In recent years, the requirement to achieve the maximum in productive target language skills has effectively discouraged all but the most gifted students from exercising the creative and analytic skills, which are involved in interpretation and mediation. Although there are convincing arguments for using only the target language in the classroom, an intercultural course would have to draw on both resources and admit some use of the native language. Further research would be necessary in order to discover whether students would make less linguistic progress as a result. However, if native speaker competence were to be recognised as an unrealistic goal for the majority, to be replaced by the concept of intelligibility, then students would be free to develop other skills. We cannot even be certain that their productive skills would suffer, without the benefit of further research. Interpretation of both documents and events might, in fact, be an ideal way of combining linguistic and intercultural learning.

It is not proposed that this *savoir* be taught before the sojourner level. For the reasons already mentioned in connection with the ability to relativise, it seems appropriate that it should be introduced post-16. Unlike *savoir être*, it presents few problems to the teacher and assessor. Documents with ethnocentric perspectives, areas of misunderstanding and conflicting interpretations abound, offering many opportunities for learners to practise their skills. It is also relatively simple to define assessment criteria of sufficiency of knowledge, clarity of explanation and mediation skills. There would be a difference of context between the sojourner level and the intercultural speaker level, in that limitations of age and experience would mean that certain topics would be covered during the upper secondary period and other, more wide ranging topics covered at university (intercultural speaker level).

6.6.4 . *Savoir Apprendre and Savoir Faire*

Although it was not possible during this project to carry out complex practical activities in order to discover whether participants possessed these *savoirs*, there was some evidence that mediation would have been carried out effectively. Participants were, in some cases, quite clear about the procedures they would adopt in certain situations. There was every reason to believe that they would be capable of the tasks, which Byram defines, provided that the context (or topic) was familiar. Previous experience of teaching in the Durham project (1994:156-166) indicated that teaching, learning and assessing these skills could be integrated into an upper secondary course. There would be a distinction between the sojourner and the intercultural speaker level, in that the area of enquiry or conflict would be restricted to a defined syllabus.

It might be argued that the emphasis on 'real time' activity in this context would debar the post-16 student from this area. However, given modern communication technology, students can now interact with foreign interlocutors without leaving the classroom. These skills are also particularly well adapted to the holiday, exchange or study visit situation. Before these *savoirs* were integrated into an upper secondary course it would be necessary to carry out a certain amount of action research. There are already schools and colleges with the necessary technology and international links to offer opportunities for action research in this field.

A number of interesting projects have been carried out recently which could be adapted to the needs of this group. The use of e-mail is increasing, and with projects such as that developed by Jogan, Heredia and Aguilera (2001) it could provide cultural input. The 'tandem learning' described by Calvert (1999) may be used in this way, where schools have suitable technology. A project by Carel with American high school students using *The Virtual Ethnographer* multimedia software package (2001) is another example. Of particular intercultural interest is the *Cultura* project developed by Furstenberg, Levet, English and Maillet, (2001) a Web-based, cross-cultural initiative which enabled French and American students to develop their understanding of cultural attitudes, concepts, beliefs and ways of interacting and looking at the world.

Another example is that of Von der Emde, Schneider and Kötter (2001), who offered their students virtual learning environments through on-line synchronous texts (MOOs.) Their students engaged in cross-cultural projects in which their awareness of their own culture was also developed, as were their critical thinking skills. It is therefore recommended that similar projects be set up in the upper secondary sector to examine ways in which students acquire new knowledge of a culture and operate knowledge, attitudes and skills in 'virtual' time if not real time.

6.6.5 *Savoir S'engager*

Byram defines this *savoir* as being 'not just for purposes of improving the effectiveness of communication and interaction, but especially for purposes of clarifying one's own ideological perspective and engaging with others consciously on the basis of that perspective'. He says that 'the consequence may include conflict in perspectives, not only harmonious communication.' (1997b:101) It is evident that this fifth *savoir* completes the educational purposes of ICC, because it encourages the learners to reflect on beliefs and values in their own and other cultures. It is precisely this aspect of the upper secondary course, which was designated as important during the third and final interviews with participants, when they had to choose ten topics out of a possible thirty which would allow them to understand French people and their way of life. (Section 5.4.) We must conclude, on the basis of this evidence, that upper secondary language learners are interested in the beliefs and values of others.

It would seem, therefore, that, despite the possible linguistic difficulties involved in the study of beliefs and values, young people are aware that engagement with a foreign culture involves a deep understanding of its value systems. Teachers might not feel comfortable with these aspects and there might be problems with regard to target language use. These are not necessarily arguments for neglecting this *savoir* at sojourner level. It may only be assessable as a component of other *savoirs*, and found only in a minority of candidates. It is evident that more research is necessary in this area.

6.7. Assessment at Sojourner Level

In order to illustrate some of the points made above, some general remarks will follow, in relation to assessment at this level. A general principle governing assessment would be the design of tasks which involve both linguistic and intercultural skills, and which, in themselves, train the prospective sojourner for the role of intercultural speaker. Following the suggested descriptors for three levels of competence reference will be made to specific examples from the data. In Section 6.8 some examples, couched in general terms, will be given of assessment tasks in which intercultural and linguistic components could be judged separately within one task. At this stage it would be possible to devise tasks either for course work (portfolio) or for performance assessment in examination conditions.

It is suggested that, criteria for assessment should consist of descriptors for each band of achievement, as is presently the case for linguistic achievement in the GCE Advanced Level and the CEF. Descriptors for intercultural competencies in this instance are developed from Byram's definitions, and applied to the assessment task in question. Sections 6.7.1-5 will offer a contribution to the development of assessment criteria for the five *savoirs* at Sojourner level, which might be equivalent to Advanced level or to Levels B1 and 2 in the CEF. The use of the native or target language will not be specified at this point. However, it is assumed that linguistic elements could either be assessed separately or that a grade boundary could be applied in cases where the candidate opted to show only comprehension of the target language and offer responses in the native language.

Thus it is envisaged that a task might involve a given number of linguistic skills, together with some intercultural skills. The weighting of various aspects of the task would be decided by the examiners and made clear to the candidates. It is clear that some tasks, such as those which involve interpretation, would require good linguistic skills. In others, where the native language was used to communicate, instead of the target language, intercultural competencies might predominate. In the definitions which follow the linguistic skills will not be specified in detail, in order not to distract from the main focus.

In the *Common European Framework of Reference*, Chapter 2 defines a number of linguistic categories, A1, A2 B1, B2, C1 and C2. They might be summarised as

representing the beginner, using language in a limited, basic fashion (A1 and A2) to the confident, fluent individual, almost approximating to a native speaker (C1 and C2), a fact which has already been pointed out in Section 3.5.8. The linguistic criteria at upper secondary level tend to fall into the B1 and B2 bands. The definitions used here will be from Levels 1 to 3. In the context of this study, they result from observation and analysis of the data obtained during the project. It is not possible at this stage, to link these levels directly to linguistic levels, or to propose more than three. Further research and study would be required in order to link linguistic and intercultural competencies and compare outcomes in the assessment process. Here, they are kept separate from the CEF and Advanced Level scales, as they were during the research project.

6.7.1 Assessment Criteria for *Savoir être*

Level 1 The candidate expresses a theoretical willingness to suspend disbelief about other cultures, but there is little evidence for this in the body of the work (written or oral) There is a tendency to over-simplify or rely on stereotyped ideas. The candidate shows an interest in discovering other perspectives, but does not engage with these perspectives or compare with his/her own environment, except in a superficial way. In oral work the candidate makes attempts to engage in the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction, but this is only successful because other speakers have made allowance for his/her difficulties.

Levels 2 and 3. The boundary here is set by the candidate's greater or lesser degree of achieving success, by the number of examples given, the clarity of explanations and the depth of understanding shown. The candidate shows concrete evidence of suspending disbelief about the other culture, by giving specific examples. This is followed through by attempts to interpret phenomena and at level 3 to question pre-suppositions in the candidate's own environment. The candidate shows evidence of an understanding of the social and psychological challenges posed by a period of residence in another country. During communication s/he is able to negotiate a position which is acceptable to all.

6.7.2 Assessment Criteria for *Savoirs*

The assessment criteria in this case would be defined in accordance with a specified content, which would be available in the syllabus. At sojourner level it might be expected that elements such as the 'processes and institutions of socialisation', 'institutions which impinge on daily life', together with an intercultural study of one historical and one geographical topic, could be regarded as a minimum, with some added options, so that candidates could pursue an individual interest, such as music or sport. Obviously linguistic criteria would be used to assess some elements of the topics, but credit would also be given for the 'knowledge' and the 'intercultural' aspects.

Level 1 Knowledge here is limited to rather straightforward and basic facts, which could have been obtained from a reference book (such as a guide book or school text book). The candidate is also able to compare between cultures, but in a rather simplistic way, without thoughtful linking of differences to background knowledge, such as the national memory, definitions of geographical space, or values and beliefs. The candidate does not systematically relate knowledge to wider cultural references, such as literary texts, or to ethnographic studies carried out in the country or through the media. When this is done, it is in the form of occasional examples without explanation or analysis.

Levels 2 and 3. Candidates here show evidence of sound knowledge of the topic, which is underpinned by an understanding of associated values and beliefs, historical context and political implications. They are also able to link and structure their knowledge with the help of literary and media studies and ethnographic enquiry. They also demonstrate intercultural competencies in that they can take on a reflexive view across and between the societies concerned. A borderline is set between 2 and 3 based on the combination of sound, well researched knowledge of both cultures and ability to take another perspective.

6.7.3 Assessment Criteria for *Savoir-comprendre*

Level 1 The candidate is able to identify obvious ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event from the home or another culture and, in a limited way, relate them to one another. S/he is not able to explain origins, except in a very superficial

way. Although s/he identifies misunderstanding in an interaction, explanations are limited to differences being stated without further elaboration. S/he attempts to mediate between interpretations but on the basis of goodwill rather than understanding of differences.

Levels 2 and 3. Here the boundary lies between full and partial explanations and the depth of understanding revealed across cultures. Misunderstanding and dysfunction are explained in such a way as to lead to mutual understanding and reconciliation, even if success is not always achieved. The candidate is able to mediate between interpretations in the sense that s/he shows detailed understanding of differences.

6.7.4 Assessment criteria for *Savoir-apprendre/faire*

Level 1 The candidate is able to engage with an interlocutor, using the target language or a combination of target and native languages in order to elicit concepts or values from a document or event, but has difficulty in developing an explanatory system, or identifying references within or across cultures. Using the target language or a combination of both s/he is able to interact with an interlocutor as long as the topics of conversation lie within familiar situations and differences can be explained in a straightforward way. In a mediation s/he shows goodwill and an understanding of the problem, but cannot move the situation forward to suggest a solution or compromise, without help from others.

Levels 2 and 3 Here the level would be judged according to the success of the interaction in terms of the skills with which the task was carried out, the references made across cultures, and the subsequent understanding gained by the candidate and demonstrated in written work. In a mediation activity, a mark would be awarded which corresponded to the knowledge skills and attitudes revealed by the candidate, and the ability to move a situation forward, whether or not a satisfactory conclusion was reached

6.7.5 Assessment criteria for *Savoir s'engager*

It is assumed that these criteria would not be available at Level 1, but might be available to those candidates who carried out certain tasks in relation to documents or events. For example in another task, involving *savoir être* or *savoir comprendre*, additional marks would be available to candidates who went beyond the level of

explanation and analysis to produce a critical evaluation on the basis of explicit criteria.

6.8 Examples from the Data

Attempts were made during the data analysis process to categorise participants on the basis of their responses. In the first interview they were asked to identify possible problems which might arise during an exchange visit and how they would deal with such problems (Section 5.2.3). Analysis of the responses indicated a group of five (none of whom had taken part in an exchange visit) which had difficulty in envisaging a problem (ICL) Another five perceived problems but could not offer a solution (ICM) and four perceived the possibility of a problem and offered a solution taking into account some cultural differences (ICH). In document work (Section 5.2.4) participants with low competencies indicated words or phrases which might cause comprehension problems to a French reader, but could not offer explanations which took account of the cultural difference. High competencies included not only the ability to indicate the elements but to give an appropriate explanation.

In the second interview (Section 5.3.1) *savoir être* was investigated by asking participants to envisage some familiar phenomena in British culture and give a French perspective. In this instance the responses were not categorised, but it was clear that some responses demonstrated greater reflexive capacities than others. When discussing French perspectives on British characteristics (Section 5.3.1.2) there were differences between those who relied on stereotyped ideas and a minority who were able to reflect and compare with values in their own country. There was also a wide range of responses in Section 5.3 to questions involving national memories and geographical space, a fact which allowed for some comparison between responses

Although in the third interview it was seldom possible to find specific evidence of improvements in intercultural competencies which could be directly attributed to learning inside or outside the classroom, there were nevertheless differences between participants. For example, those who had visited France on a regular basis had some

idea of differences in the educational and administrative systems which would need to be explained (Section 5.4.1.2). The four who had undertaken exchange visits in the lower secondary school seemed to have retained some information about French family and social life and were able to show some *savoir faire* in order to carry out the 'mediation task' in Section 5.4.2.

6.9 Assessment tasks at Sojourner Level

The tasks described below are samples of activities which could be carried out by an upper secondary student on a regular basis, and which could also be assessed for formative or summative purposes.

6.9.1 Example of an Ethnographic Enquiry Task (portfolio assessment)

Savoir être A candidate at sojourner level chooses a topic of enquiry. If the examiner finds evidence of the student's interest in discovering other perspectives on phenomena in both cultures, and a willingness to question values and pre-suppositions in his/her own culture, this is credited.

Savoirs Drawing on factual knowledge about both cultures, which is appropriate to the subject of the enquiry, the candidate provides evidence of an ability to bring the two areas of knowledge into relationship with each other. Different grades would be awarded, according to the appropriateness of the knowledge and the skill shown in relating the two cultures. Linguistic skills would also be assessed by evidence in the target language.

Savoir Apprendre The evidence includes oral/written communication in the target language with an informant. This would normally be in the form of an interview or a questionnaire. The ability to acquire new knowledge by careful design of a schedule and appropriate questioning would be judged and credited

Savoir faire The candidate would be judged on his/her ability to follow up the task above with an appropriate interaction, an explanatory system, involving references within and across cultures as necessary. Linguistic skills would also be assessed.

6.9.2 Example of an Interpretation Task

Savoir Comprendre The candidate is given a document in the native language, which contains a number of ethnocentric perspectives. These perspectives are identified by the candidate, who provides explanations in terms of each of the cultural systems present. Judgements are made on the basis of the clarity and accuracy of the explanations in terms of each culture. The candidate would also provide a translation or summary in order to demonstrate linguistic skills. This task could also be carried out with a document in the target language.

Savoir S'Engager

In addition to the above, the candidate is able to make a critical analysis of the document, identifying and interpreting explicit or implicit values in both cultures.

6.9.3 Example of a Mediation Task

Savoir être The candidate demonstrates readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction, as appropriate to the situation, and is credited accordingly.

Savoirs The candidate draws upon appropriate knowledge about both cultures in order to identify the source of the problem which has arisen.

Savoir Comprendre The candidate identifies areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction and explains them in terms of each of the cultural systems present.

Savoir faire The candidate attempts to mediate between two interlocutors. Credit is given for the practical skills shown, whether or not the mediation proves to be successful.

Linguistic skills are also credited for accuracy and clarity, where the candidate is acting as interpreter.

These sample suggestions are offered as an example of assessment forms which might be developed to replace the present systems, which are operated by Advanced Level Examination Boards. It is evident that the introduction of intercultural elements would reduce the present importance given to linguistic skills. Indeed, it is proposed that the descriptor 'intelligibility' should replace the present descriptors of

'almost always fluent' and 'high level of accuracy' (Edexcel). Experience of examining has shown that these are interpreted by examiners in such a way as to withhold high marks from all those, who do not approximate to the 'educated native speaker' standard. Such a change would not, it is argued, lead to a lowering of standards. The demands on the student to demonstrate a high level of intercultural competence would be rigorous, and would entail the acquisition of skills and knowledge equal to other subjects at this level. .

It would be possible to extend this thesis almost indefinitely, by means of a prolonged discussion of alternative methods of assessing intercultural competencies. As the problem is exercising many minds at the present time, the above suggestions can be regarded as a contribution to the thinking on this matter. The changes represent a radical shift of emphasis and would entail the retraining of assessors and teachers. Whether or not, in the present educational climate, it would be possible to effect the paradigm shift, referred to by Gipps, it should certainly be recognised that:

Assessment is not an exact science, and we must stop presenting it as such. This is of course part of the post-modern condition – a suspension of the belief in the absolute status of 'scientific' knowledge.(1994:167)

The exacting nature of present educational assessment in foreign languages is reflected in the model of the 'educated native speaker', which was discussed and criticised with reference to the work of both Byram and Kramersch in Section 2.5. It is clear from the definitions in the CEF, the European Portfolio of Languages, and in the assessment schemes at present used by GCE examination boards, that this mythical figure is firmly entrenched. The reason for its existence is that it appears to offer a standard, which is apparently simple and reliable to measure. If, however, we suspend our belief in the absolute status of such a figure, and consider instead the wider implications of intercultural communication, we can see that it is not only an unrealistic goal, but also that it fails to consider the privileges and advantages enjoyed by the intercultural position..

6.10 Conclusion

The advantage of foreign language learning, both for the individual and for society, is that it leads to a deeper knowledge and understanding of both the home and foreign languages and cultures, and ultimately, of the self. In the distant past, such

'intercultural competence' was the preserve of an educated elite in the limited context of literature and the arts. Those who specialise in languages today also need intercultural competence, a concept which entails a much broader range of knowledge and skills than in the past, as well as specific attitudes. Although it may be difficult to define all these, we should continue the effort to do so.

With hindsight, it seems that the rapid introduction of 'Languages for All' during the last forty years led to a false separation between a language and the cultures in which it is embedded. Foreign language learning became defined in terms of linguistic skills, and pedagogy concerned itself with the efficient definition and transmission of these skills. Although there is a general awareness that this approach is insufficient on its own, there is a reluctance to move away from safe territory, where 'standards' can be easily defined. Unfortunately, learners themselves have been diminished in the process, and the hard-won competencies they acquire at upper secondary level seem to qualify them for nothing more than the position of 'second class citizen' in the target cultures.

A growing body of research and development in the last decade has helped to reinterpret the nature and purpose of foreign language learning in a world, in which mobility between countries and continents has become a defining characteristic. The development of the European Union, and in particular the work of the Council of Europe, has encouraged much creative work among foreign language educators in the field of intercultural knowledge and understanding. We should expect, therefore that young people will move across frontiers, more easily than in the past, and will be active in encouraging peaceful co-operation between all nations. Therefore they should be regarded as 'intercultural speakers', willing and able to occupy a 'Third Place' and possessing a number of unique competencies. These competencies might best be summarised by two entries in the recently published *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Language Teaching and Learning*.

Firstly, in situations involving intercultural communication, intercultural speakers would not be simply measured against native speakers of another language. Nor would they have at their disposal a vast amount of cultural knowledge with which to impress their interlocutors. Muller-Jacquier defines their position as follows:

The participants in intercultural situations are aware of the culture bound character of meanings and try constructively, in the sense of the original meaning of the Latin *communicare*, to create for themselves a comprehension base for jointly defined frames, meanings, linguistic action and procedures. (2000:296)

We might contrast this stance with the 'folklorisation of the cultural mind', rightly criticised by Mariet, in his discussion on the subject of common European perspective (Section 2.2.1). In the definition quoted above speakers are engaged in dialogue and create new identities, or 'Thirdness' for themselves in the process. In the situation described by Mariet, encounter with otherness does nothing but confirm the ethnocentric position.

Could the stance of intercultural speaker also be achieved, albeit within limitations, by upper secondary learners? It seems, to judge by the evidence analysed in this thesis, that learners at this stage have the potential to decentre, to view their own culture objectively and in some cases critically. If, as at present, there is no thought given to the *savoirs*, the cultural context of their learning or to the complementary *savoirs -être, apprendre, comprendre and faire*, then there seems less likelihood that the key *savoir, savoir s'engager*, or critical cultural awareness, will develop spontaneously, at a later date.

For, in order to become engaged with the foreign culture in the first instance, there must be among teachers and learners some understanding of the changes in schemata, or mental frameworks involved. The process should be coherent and should involve the individual in a personal journey. It should also engage the learner in critical reflection on self and otherness, processes which empower individuals and enable them to contribute to society.

It seems from the data collected in this study, that upper secondary language learners begin their studies with the necessary openness and curiosity to engage themselves upon a personal journey towards otherness. In many cases it seems likely that this goal is subsequently interpreted as a journey towards 'native speaker competence', a hard upward path to a lonely summit. Guilherme's definition of intercultural speaker, which follows and develops that of Muller-Jacquier in the *Encyclopaedia*, offers an alternative view which is challenging, yet engages learners and teachers.

The intercultural speaker has to negotiate between their own cultural, social and political identifications and representations, with those of the other, that is they must be critical. The *critical* (author's italics) intercultural speaker takes critical advantage of the world opened wide to them by appreciating the different narratives available, by reflecting on how they articulate, how they are positioned and how their positions affect their perspectives. (2000:298)

The intercultural speaker, then, in the fullest sense of the world has a specific identity and role in the modern world. If we examine the conflicts and difficulties of this world, the need for such individuals seems clear.

An ethnocentric view of the world encourages secure feelings of social and national identity in populations, which, in the past, were largely isolated from each other. The tragic consequences of this view can be seen in wars which are undertaken for the purposes of 'ethnic cleansing', or to combat 'an axis of evil'. Intercultural competence on a global scale has never been more necessary. This is why the concept should replace that of 'cultural knowledge'. It is quite possible to have factual, cultural, knowledge about the 'other', whilst remaining convinced that our own ways are superior. Knowledge, combined with the ability to speak another language, does not necessarily ensure mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence. Intercultural communicative competencies, however, offer not only personal and intellectual development for the individual, who becomes 'critically and culturally aware', but also a practical means of achieving more harmonious society on a local and international scale. These competencies should be acknowledged as a vital part of foreign language learning and students' progress and achievements should be rewarded in this domain. This thesis offers a contribution towards the thinking in this field.

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APPENDIX I QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is part of a research project designed to help us understand the way people change their views as they progress through an A level course, in this case a modern language course. We are trying to find out the main reasons why students at 16 choose to study a language at A or AS level and the expectations they have about the course.

This project will also follow the progress of a number of students through their two year period in order to see how their ideas change as a result of their studies.

It will be very useful to us if you fill in this questionnaire in a very straightforward way with the first ideas that come to you. If you have no intention of studying a modern language at A level we are still interested in your views. There is no need to pretend an interest or enthusiasm you do not have. All the information you give is **ABSOLUTELY CONFIDENTIAL** to the researchers. Neither your name nor your school will be disclosed. Codes will be used in any publications in order to protect your anonymity.

If you do not understand one of the questions, raise your hand and the researcher will help you.

Thank you very much for your co-operation.

SECTION 1

Please answer all the questions in this section. If you have not made any decisions about your A levels just put down the most likely subjects.

Name.....

Sex (please circle) M F

School.....

I have studied.....for.....years

I have studied.....for.....years

My mock GCSE French grade was.....

My mock GCSE German/Spanish grade was.....

(please delete the language which does not apply)

The countries I have visited outside the UK are (please specify)

.....

My first choice A level will probably be.....

If I had to do 5 AS levels in Year 12 they would probably be

.....

Please answer the following questions for your first choice A level only

Coding

Circle 1 for YES 2 for UNDECIDED 3 for NO

Coding

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| a) I have always been good at this subject | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| b) I know that the results at the school/college are good | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| c) The subject is connected with my career choice | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| d) The staff who teach the subject are good | 1 | 2 | 3 |

SECTION 2

Please answer the following questions in relation to your main GCSE foreign language study. If you think that two languages are about equal then please answer for French, as this is the language most commonly studied at A/As level.

I am answering these questions for.....

The questions are scored on a scale from 1 to 5 as follows:

(The first group of questions have a 6 for Not Applicable)

1 = I strongly agree

2 = I agree

3 = I am undecided

4 = I disagree

5 = I strongly disagree

6 = Not applicable

Please ring the number which applies to you eg 1 2 3 4 5 6

- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I have had an enjoyable holiday in the country
where the language is spoken | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. I have made good friends there on an exchange | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. If I choose to do this at A level it will partly be
because I like the staff concerned | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. The A level results in this subject here are
usually good | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. I have enjoyed the group and pair work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 6. I would only continue with a language if
I needed it for my work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 7. I shall only need English for my chosen career | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 8. I enjoy working on grammar rules | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Coding

9. I would only go abroad if I could stay
among English people 1 2 3 4 5
10. The tapes seem to go too quickly 1 2 3 4 5
11. I would only do a language if my other
grades were disappointing 1 2 3 4 5
12. I would watch subtitled TV from that
country if I could 1 2 3 4 5
13. I could see myself eating and drinking in
the traditions of that country 1 2 3 4 5
14. I enjoy guessing the meanings of new
foreign words 1 2 3 4 5
15. It is boring to concentrate on grammar
spelling 1 2 3 4 5
16. I could see myself married to a native of
that country and bringing up children there 1 2 3 4 5
17. If I go abroad I want foreigners to speak
English to me 1 2 3 4 5
18. It's only worth speaking the language when
you have to travel or work in the country 1 2 3 4 5
19. I can usually remember correct spellings in
the language 1 2 3 4 5
20. I try to find out extra things about the country
from books, papers and TV 1 2 3 4 5
21. I would enjoy spending six months or more in that
country as a student or a worker 1 2 3 4 5
22. I enjoy reading in the language even if I have to look
up words 1 2 3 4 5
23. I think it's very important to have a friendly
atmosphere in a language class 1 2 3 4 5
24. I enjoy listening to native speakers even when
I don't understand it all 1 2 3 4 5
25. I could see myself becoming close friends with a
person of that nationality 1 2 3 4 5
26. I find it easy to remember new words and phrases
in the language 1 2 3 4 5
27. It's not worth learning a foreign language

Coding

Coding

- as most foreigners speak English 1 2 3 4 5
28. I enjoy speaking the language 1 2 3 4 5
29. I think it is important to have a friendly teacher
if you want to succeed in languages 1 2 3 4 5
30. My most important reason for working in the
language class is to get a good grade 1 2 3 4 5

Thank you for answering this section of the questionnaire. If you included a modern language in your list of possible A/AS level subjects we would now be interested to find out your opinion of the topics which might be studied.

SECTION 3

Please answer the questions in this section if you included one or two modern languages in your choice of 5 A/AS level subjects. If you have a choice, please choose French as it is the language most commonly studied at A level.

I am answering these questions for.....

The following topics might be studied during an A/AS level language course. Which topics in your opinion would be most important to help you understand the people and their way of life? Would you please circle the number which most closely corresponds with your own opinion.

1 - very important

2 = fairly important

3 = not necessary

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The way young people live | | | |
| 2. The way people of older generations live | | | |
| 3. Popular entertainment | | | |
| 4. Family life, the upbringing of children | | | |
| 5. School and university life | | | |
| 6. Social problems common to that country
and Britain (eg drugs, AIDS) | | | |
| 7. Law and order, crime and delinquency | | | |
| 8. Values and beliefs | | | |
| 9. Scientific and technical developments | | | |
| 10. The political and administrative systems | | | |
| 11. Jobs people do and their work routines | | | |
| 12. Work related problems, unemployment, strikes | | | |
| 13. Food and drink and its preparation | | | |
| 14. The most important historical events | | | |

Coding

Coding

15.The main geographical features of the country	1	2	3
16.Social class differences and attitudes	1	2	3
17.Festivals and celebrations	1	2	3
18.The media (press and television)	1	2	3
19.Environmental problems	1	2	3
20.The tourist attractions of the country	1	2	3
21.The study of one particular region in depth	1	2	3
22.Famous artists and their work	1	2	3
23.Extracts from books, poems, short stories	1	2	3
24.A full length novel	1	2	3
25.The films of one particular director	1	2	3
26.Ethnic minority groups within the society	1	2	3
27.The role of women in the society	1	2	3
28.Relations with other countries	1	2	3
29.Sporting and leisure activities	1	2	3
30.Community life in towns and villages	1	2	3

If you would be willing to be interviewed in order to discuss your progress during your A/AS level course would you please tick here.....

Many thanks for your help.

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW 1

Can you tell me which references here you would have to explain to a French person who didn't know much about England

We drove home over the tops, a winding 6-mile drive of unutterable loveliness, up on to the Wuthering Heights-like expanses around Kirkby Fell, with boundless views of Northern glory, and then began to descend into the serene, cupped majesty of Malhamdale, the little lost world that had been my home for seven years. Halfway down, I had my wife stop the car by a field gate. My favourite view in the world is there, and I got out to have a look. You can see almost the whole of Malhamdale; sheltered and snug beneath steep imposing hills, with its arrow straight drystone walls climbing up impossibly ambitious slopes, its clustered hamlets, its wonderful little two room schoolhouse, the old church with its sycamores and tumbling tombstones, the roof of my local pub, and in the centre of it all, obscured by trees, our old stone house, which itself is far older than my native land.

It looked so peaceful and wonderful that I could almost have cried, and yet it was only a tiny part of this small enchanted island. Suddenly, in the space of a moment, I realised what it was I loved about Britain – which is to say all of it. Every last bit of it, good and bad – Marmite, village fêtes, country lanes, people saying 'mustn't grumble' and 'I'm terribly sorry but', people apologising to *me* when I conk them with a careless elbow, milk in bottles, beans on toast, haymaking in June, stinging nettles, seaside piers, Ordnance Survey maps, crumpets, hot water bottles as a necessity, drizzly Sundays – every bit of it.

Bill Bryson 'Notes from a Small World' published by Black Swan 1995

Now can you tell me which references you would have to explain in the following passage to an English person who didn't know much about France.

We parked by the bridge and woke our friends. They had gone to bed, reluctant and still boisterous, at two in the morning, and the bright light was having savage effects on their hangovers. They hid behind sunglasses and nursed big cups of café crème. At the dark end of the bar, a gendarme swallowed a surreptitious pastis. The man selling lottery tickets promised instant wealth to anyone who hesitated by his table. Two overnight truck drivers with blue sandpaper chins attacked their breakfast of steak and pommes frites and shouted for more wine. The fresh smell of the river came in through the open door, and ducks trod water while they waited for crumbs to be swept off the terrace.

We set off for the main square, running the gauntlet between sallow gypsy girls in tight shiny black skirts selling lemons and long plaits of garlic, hissing at each other in competition. The stalls were crammed haphazardly along the street – silver jewellery next to flat wedges of salt-cod, wooden barrels of gleaming olives, hand woven baskets, cinnamon and saffron and vanilla, cloudy bunches of gypsophilia, a cardboard box full of mongrel puppies, lurid Johnny Halliday T shirts, salmon pink corsets and brassies of heroic proportions, rough country bread and dark terrines

Peter Mayle 'A Year in Provence'

Hamish Hamilton 1989

APPENDIX III INTERVIEW 3

Passage 1

This is an extract from Sons and Lovers, an autobiographical novel by D.H. Lawrence. When you have read the passage can you tell me which references in the passage you would have to explain to a French person, who didn't know much about England or its way of life:-

When he was nineteen, he was earning only twenty shillings a week, but he was happy. His painting went well, and life went well enough. On the Good Friday he organised a walk to the Hemlock Stone. There were three lads of his own age, then Annie and Arthur, Miriam and Geoffrey. Arthur, apprenticed as an electrician in Nottingham, was home for the holiday. Morel, as usual, was up early, whistling and sawing in the yard. At seven o'clock the family heard him buy threepennyworth of hot cross buns, he talked with gusto to the little girl who brought them, calling her 'my darling'. He turned away several boys who came with more buns, telling them they had been 'kested' by a little lass. Then Mrs. Morel got up and the family straggled down. It was an immense luxury to everybody, this lying in bed just beyond the ordinary time on a weekday. And Paul and Arthur read before breakfast, and had the meal unwashed, sitting in their shirtsleeves. This was another holiday luxury. The room was warm. Everything felt free of care and anxiety. There was a sense of plenty in the house.

While the boys were reading, Mrs. Morel went into the garden. They were now in another house, an old one near the Scargill Street home, which had been left soon after William had died. Directly came an excited cry from the garden:

'Paul, Paul, come and look!'

It was his mother's voice. He threw down his book and went out. There was a long garden that ran to a field. It was a grey, cold day, with a sharp wind blowing out of Derbyshire. Two fields away Bestwood began, with a jumble of roofs and red house ends, out of which rose the church tower and the spire of the Congregational Chapel. And beyond went woods and hills, right away to the pale grey heights of the Pennine Chain. Paul looked down the garden for his mother. Her head appeared among the young current bushes.

D.H. Lawrence Sons and Lovers London: Collins

INTERVIEW 3

Passage 2

In this extract, the author, who is a French secondary school teacher of English, has been listening to someone complaining that nowadays children don't learn anything at school – his son can't even tell him the capital of America. When you have read the passage, tell me which references in this text you would need to explain to an English person who didn't know much about French people and their way of life.

I made myself appear scandalised straight away – I was disassociating myself from a lazy bunch of people who are no longer doing their job properly. But there was nothing I could do, he was banging his fist on the desk, shouting at me, the representative of that rotten teaching profession which isn't even up to the level of television quiz games.

'Really I don't know what they are playing at in schools! And as for the strikes and the holidays ... anyway I don't want to get into an argument...

He sighed, he didn't want to push it too far, he had just remembered that I was a customer and all that...

But all the same, the main towns in France! We used to learn the names of the prefectures, the sub-prefectures!..

I must point out here that your typical Frenchman is a great fan of capitals. Capitals, root- cap, chief, head. Nothing to do with the word 'chief' is foreign to him. The chief towns of the departments! Ah yes the chief towns! It is there that everything is controlled. It is there that you find the prefect, the direct representative of the government, of order. The executive power, for goodness sake! Giving orders for general mobilisation, putting down riots, everything... Nothing is innocent. That method of dinning the prefectures into our parents was to get them used to idea of government authority, forge discipline into the marrow of their bones. It worked a treat it must be said: an eminent leader writer in *Le Monde*, pouring scorn on the efforts of minority groups to gain some dignity for themselves, could find no more solid argument for making fun of the Occitans that "Where's your capital then? You haven't even got a capital!" Amazing!

Claude Duneton Je suis comme une truie qui doute Éditions du Seuil 1976

APPENDIX IV

The pages which follow are reproduced from the 1998 second draft of the proposal for a Common European Framework of reference for language learning, teaching and assessment.

Published by the Council of Europe: Strasbourg 1998

Table 1	External content of use.	p 21
Table 7	Draft for a self assessment orientation	p133
Table 8	Example of a grid for spoken interaction	p134

Table 1. EXTENSIVE CONTEXT OF USE

Domain	Locations	Institutions	Persons	Objects	Events	Operations	Texts
Personal	Home: own () house of family () rooms of friends () garden of strangers) Own space in hostel, hotel The countryside, seaside etc.	The Family Social networks	(Grand)Parents, Offspring, Siblings, Aunt, Uncle, Cousins, In-law, Spouses Intimates, Friends, Acquaintances	Furnishing & furniture Clothing Household equipment Toys, tools, personal hygiene Objects d'art, Books, Pets, Wild /domestic animals, Trees, Plants, Lawn, Ponds, Household goods, Handbags, leisure/sports equipment	Family occasions Encounters Incidents, accidents, Natural phenomena Parties, visits Walking, cycling, motoring Holidays, excursions Sports events	Living routines e.g. dressing, undressing, cooking, eating, washing DIY, gardening Reading, Radio & TV Entertaining Hobbies Games & sports	Texteint Guarantees Recipes Instructional material Novels, magazines, Newspapers Junk mail Brochures Personal letters Broadcast and recorded spoken texts
Public	Public spaces : street, square, park, etc. Public transport Shops (super)/markets Hospitals, surgeries, clinic Sports stadia, fields, halls Theatre, cinema, entertainment Restaurant, pub, hotel Places of worship	Public authorities Political bodies The law Public Health Services clubs Societies Political parties Denominations	Members of the Public Officials Shop personnel Police, army, security Drivers, conductor, Passengers Players, fans, spectators Actors, audiences Waiters, barpersons Receptionists Priests, Congregation	Money, purse, wallet Forms, Goods Weapons Rucksacks Cases, Grips Balls Programmes Meals, Drinks, Snacks Passports, Licences	Incidents Accidents, illnesses Public meetings Law-suits, Court trials Rag-dnys, Fines, Arrests Matches, contests Performances Weddings, Funerals	Buying and obtaining public services Using medical services Journeys by road/rails/ ship/air Public entertainment and leisure activities Religious services	Public announcements and notices Labels & packaging Leaflets, Graffiti Tickets, Timetables Notices, Regulations Programmes Contracts Menus Sacred texts Sermons, Hymns
Occupational	Offices Factories Workshops Ports, railways Farms Airports Stores, shops etc. Service Industries Hotels	Firms Civil Service Multinational Corporations Nationalised Industries Trade Unions	Employers/ees Managers Colleagues Subordinates Workmates Clients Customers Receptionists, Secretaries Cleaners etc.	Business machinery Industrial machinery Industrial & craft tools	Meetings Interviews Receptions Conferences Trade fairs Consultations Seasonal sales Industrial accidents Industrial disputes	Business admi-n. Industrial management Production operations Office procedures Trucking Sales operations Selling, marketing Computer operation Works office Maintenance	Business letter Report Memorandum Life & safety notices Instructional manuals Regulations Advertising material Labelling & packaging Job description Sign posting Visiting cards etc.
Educational	Schools : Hall Classrooms, Playground, Sports fields, corridors Colleges Universities Lecture Theatres Seminar rooms Halls of Residence Laboratories Canteen	School College University Learned societies Professional Institutions Adult education bodies	Class teachers Teaching staff Caretakers Assistant staff Parents Classmates Professors, lecturers (Fellow) Students Library & laboratory staff Refectory staff, cleaners Porters, Secretaries etc.	Writing material School uniforms Games equipment & clothing Food Audio-visual equipment Black-board & chalk Computers Briefcases & School bags	Return to school / entry Breaking up Visits and Exchanges Parents' days / evenings Sports days, Matches Disciplinary problems	Assembly Lessons Games Playtime Clubs & societies Lectures, Essay writing Laboratory work Library work Seminars & tutorials homework Debates & discussions	Authentic texts (as above) Textbooks, Readers Reference books Blackboard text OP text Computer screen text Videotext Exercises materials Journal articles Abstracts Dictionaries

	A2.1	A2.2	B1.1	B1.2	B2
Comprehension	Can understand what is said clearly, slowly and directly to him/her in simple everyday conversation.	Can generally identify the topic of discussion around him/her which is spoken slowly and clearly. Can generally understand and when people speak clearly about familiar matters, provided he/she can sometimes ask the speaker for repetition.	Can generally follow the main points of extended discussion around him/her, provided people speak clearly in standard dialect. Can follow clear, standard speech directed at him/her in everyday conversation, though sometimes has to ask for repetition of particular words and phrases.	Can with effort catch much of what is said around him/her, provided people speak clearly in standard dialect. Can understand what is said directly to him/her, provided the speaker avoids idiomatic usage and speaks clearly.	Can catch most of what is said in his/her presence, but may find it difficult to participate effectively in discussion with several native speakers who do not modify their language in any way. Can understand in detail what is said to him/her in the standard spoken language even in a noisy environment.
Conversation	Can handle very short social exchanges but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.	Can participate in short conversations in routine contexts on topics of interest.	Can enter unprepared into conversations on familiar topics. Can maintain a conversation or discussion but may sometimes be difficult to follow when trying to say exactly what he/she would like to.	Can interact competently on informal social occasions. Can maintain conversation with unfamiliar people (e.g. visitors) on subjects of immediate relevance or areas related to his/her interests or field.	Can engage in extended conversation on most general topics in a clearly participatory fashion, even in a noisy environment. Can sustain interactions with native speakers without requiring them to behave other than the way they would behave with a native speaker.
Transaction	Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of limited information on familiar and routine matters to do with work and free time. Can make simple transactions in shops, post offices, banks etc..	Can make him/herself understood and exchange information on familiar topics connected with common aspects of everyday living such as travel, accommodation, eating and shopping.	Can deal with most transactions likely to arise while travelling, arranging travel or accommodation, or dealing with authorities during a foreign visit. Can find out and pass on straightforward factual information and obtain more detailed information when necessary.	Can understand, exchange, check and confirm and summarize straightforward factual information and deal with difficult, less routine situations, though may occasionally have to ask for repetition if the other person's response is rapid or extended.	Can understand and exchange detailed information reliably, explain a problem and make it clear in a disagreement that a concession is necessary.
Discussion	Can discuss everyday practical issues in a simple way when addressed clearly, slowly and directly.	Can say what he/she thinks about things when addressed directly, provided he/she can ask for repetition of key points if necessary.	Can discuss topics of interest. Can express belief, opinion, agreement and disagreement politely.	Can explain why something is a problem, and can compare and contrast different alternative suggestions or solutions, commenting on the views of others.	Can take an active part in discussion and put a point of view clearly. Can account for and sustain opinions by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments.

TABLE 8

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Listening	I can recognise familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular stances or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation of discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes & ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for examples sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write detailed expositions of complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can write different kinds of texts in an assured, personal, style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

TABLE 7

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