Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper secondary education in the Canary Islands, Spain

Richard Clouet
Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
España

Abstract

Since the early 1990s, there has been a growing interest in the cultural dimension of foreign language education, and teachers today are expected to promote the acquisition of intercultural competence in their learners. The present study aims to investigate the role of culture in the teaching of foreign languages and particularly the interrelationship of language and culture in the process of learning/teaching English as a foreign language in an increasingly multicultural society like that of the Canary Islands, Spain. It also proposes to delve into the opinions and attitudes of secondary school Spanish teachers of English and their pupils on intercultural competence and to see how and to what extent these opinions and attitudes are reflected in their classroom applications. In order to give the most complete vision possible of this intercultural approach, of its use in the classroom, of its precedents, of its current situation and of the methodological proposals, we hereby present the way we have drawn up two questionnaires in a parallel way to investigate how both students and EFL teachers in upper secondary education in the Canary Islands perceive the importance of the intercultural component in the language class.

Keywords: learning/teaching; intercultural; foreign languages; multicultural.

Afiliación: Facultad de Traducción e Interpretación, Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.
Correo electrónico: rclouet@dfm.ulpgc.es
Dirección postal: Calle Pérez del Toro, 1, 35003, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, España.

310

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

1. Introduction

The society in which we live is, and has been, multicultural although the present cultural diversity has certain characteristics which are different to other times and historical moments. Mixing, communicating and living with people from different cultures involves a certain amount of preparation and competence. In this respect, the foreign language class is the ideal place to express this type of educational intervention. To have a good command of a language does not only mean understanding and knowing how to use its grammatical structures but also understanding the culture in which the language is used and learning how to place one culture in contact with the other. Consequently, students must continually develop more efficient intercultural communication skills.

Among the many difficulties the foreign language teacher may encounter in the classroom when teaching these skills there may be two in particular. Firstly, the possible uneasiness of the teacher who, on many occasions, feels that he/she is not up-to-date with the latest methods or does not have sufficient knowledge in the area. Secondly, the attitude of the student when faced with a foreign culture. In relation to the attitude of the students, teachers continually state that the difficulties originate from one or more of the following: insufficient sociocultural competence or, often, from a lack of linguistic competence, sometimes from a lack of understanding, a bad interpretation or simply from misunderstanding. The methods used for correction and learning try to remedy these problems but, more often than not, this does not happen or it seems that the short and medium term results are unsatisfactory.

The situation described leads us to consider the need to develop intercultural competences that favour intercultural communication and dialogue. In order to do this, it is important to understand, on the one hand, the educational, social and economic background we are talking about and, on the other, the theoretical principles we have used to parallely set up two questionnaires the aim of which will be to investigate how both students and EFL teachers in upper secondary education in the Canary Islands, Spain, perceive the importance of the intercultural component in the language class. The basic aim of this research is to study the role of culture in the teaching of foreign languages and particularly the interrelationship of language

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper...

311

and culture in the process of learning/teaching English as a foreign language in an increasingly multicultural society like that of the Canary Islands.

2. Background of the research and theoretical approach

For the last two decades, Spanish education has had to face the challenge of diversity, and tremendous increase in cultural heterogeneity of educational settings. This change has transformed the nature of the experience of teaching and learning languages to a great extent, since multicultural classrooms create a heightened need for intercultural communication.

This is even more relevant in the Canary Islands if we consider the changes that have been taking place in this Spanish autonomous region in the last few years. Over recent years, schools in the Canary Islands have experienced great changes, the most significant one probably being the large number of immigrant schoolchildren as a result of an economy based primarily on tourism – many of these pupils will actually end up working in the tourism industry although they had not planned to do so. In the south of Gran Canaria, for example, 140 different nationalities have been registered in secondary school classrooms (data provided by the *Centro del Profesorado Gran Canaria Sur*, the teacher training centre of the South of Gran Canaria).

The questionnaires, the contextualization of which we are explaining hereafter, were handed out to A'Level (or baccalaureate) students and teachers in various schools of Gran Canaria. The Spanish baccalaureate (also known as the *Bachillerato*) programme consists of two years' voluntary study after the age of 16, which prepares pupils for higher education or high-grade vocational training or to start a career. It is very similar to the A-Level and Further Education system in the UK.

Under recent Education system reforms, all students are required to study the following subjects up to leaving school: Spanish (language and literature); philosophy & citizenship; one foreign language; a regional language (such as Catalan or Valenciano); the history of philosophy; the history of Spain; modern sciences and physical education. Further to the seven compulsory subjects listed above (or 8 if you fall in one of those

312

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

regions with an autonomous language), students must then nominate a field to specialise in – arts; science & technology or humanities & social sciences. At the end of this 2 year period, students are required to take an examination called the *Prueba de Acceso a la Universidad* (PAU), and once this exam has been passed –along with the previous exams held throughout the school year– they are then awarded the *Bachiller* certificate which shows the overall grade of competence attained.

These exams are prepared, supervised and corrected by both secondary school teachers and university teachers, hence our interest as a university teacher and researcher in trying to help pupils and teachers face a new imperative when preparing their students for university entrance: that of multicultural awareness and intercultural communication.

Although Canary curriculum now suggests all teachers of English should become aware of this new diversity and of aspects of intercultural communication (*BOC nº 112*, 06/06/08), no further explanation is provided. Spanish educational policy as far as language teaching is concerned is simply cross-referred to the Common European language policy standards in teaching languages and cultures, which means that the learners should acquire certain general and sociocultural knowledge and develop certain communicative and intercultural skills (Council of Europe, 2001: 101-130). Thus, special attention is paid to developing intercultural skills that mean: the ability of the learners to bring the culture of origin, i.e. the native culture of the learners and the foreign culture into relation with each other; the ability to be sensitive and use a variety of strategies for contact with those from other cultures; the capacity to fulfill the role of cultural intermediary between one's own culture and the foreign culture and to deal effectively with intercultural misunderstandings and conflict situations; and the ability to overcome stereotyped relationships.

These education rules and regulations seem to be an instance of giving advance notice to teachers of new required competencies. The new multicultural reality has obliged teachers to revise their curricular projects in order to adapt them to this situation and to teach their pupils to face this new global imperative by reflecting on their culture in relation to others. This is consistent with the development of a degree of cultural sensitivity on the part of students, that is to say, it brings students closer to a reality that, on occasions, might be the same

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper...

313

as, and on others similar to or totally different from their own. In *Learning and Teaching Across Cultures in Higher Education* (2010), for instance, David Palfreyman and Dawn McBride provide theoretical rationale, resources and examples to help understand and deal with situations involving contact between learners or educators from different cultural backgrounds, as well as giving insights into the new global context of higher education. They highlight the complexities of intercultural teaching and learning and expand the theoretical and practical possibilities.

Consequently, learning a language no longer means acquiring communicative competence, in other words being able to act in a foreign language in linguistically, sociolinguistically and pragmatically appropriate ways (Council of Europe, 2001), but becoming interculturally competent, which is being able "to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures" (Meyer, 1991: 138). This interaction, according to Byram, does not only imply an effective interchange of information, as was the goal of communicative language teaching, but also the "the ability to decentre and take up the other's perspective on their own culture, anticipating and where possible, resolving dysfunctions in communication and behavior " (Byram, 1997: 42).

Nowadays, language teachers can have access to a wide range of studies that provide insights into the linguistic and social skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural contact situations. We can thus mention studies in the field of social psychology, as well as studies of intercultural communication (Wiseman & Koester, 1993). They also have Byram's valuable model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) that emphasizes a set of competences that should be acquired by foreign language students and organizes them around five key factors: Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills of interpreting and relating, Skills of discovery and interaction and Political education including critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997).

This approach was further developed in the work of Meyer (2000), who argues that intercultural competence is a combination of social and communicative skills, including: empathy, ability to deal with conflict, ability to work collaboratively, flexibility, foreign language awareness, awareness that culture causes different discussion styles, speech speeds, interpretation

314

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

and thought patterns, techniques for handling interactional difficulties, reflection on one's own cultural background and tolerance of ambiguity.

Broadly, intercultural communication involves the ability to cope with one's own cultural background in interaction with others. Byram's model further stresses that ICC requires "certain attitudes" which include "curiosity and openness as well as readiness to see other cultures and the speaker's own without being judgmental."

However, because culture is context-specific and thus dynamic – Kramsch (1998) reminds us that culture involves membership in a discourse community – intercultural understandings and development are dynamic too. Consequently, if culture is embodied in what people do and the way they use their knowledge at a certain time in a certain context, we may wonder if it is truly possible for teachers to facilitate ICC without giving their students the opportunity to experience "other" cultures first-hand and if the development of intercultural communicative competence should not be best facilitated through active production and reflection that relate to real communication contexts and real life. Our personal "cultural baggage" as a French native speaker who, after teaching English as a Foreign Language in France and French as a Foreign Languages in England for several years is now an EFL teacher in Spain, supports the conclusion that intercultural relationships are very important in constructions of our own identity and others', and those relationships are ideally expressed through language. This baggage has provided us with a lens through which we have been able to assess our practice, trying to give our students not only the opportunity for a "two-way cultural learning process" (Young, 1996: 165) through criticism and discussion, but also multicultural content in the English classroom as a premise for authentic and respectful dialogue. Dialogue with and between students helps everyone expland their cultural knowledge and transform their understanding of otherness. This is precisely why these new cultural encounters that take place in the multicultural classroom should enable teachers of English to transform their professional practice.

More recently, Miquel Rodrigo Alsina (2003) argued that intercultural communication can be understood as interpersonal communication in which the intervention of people with cultural references that are sufficiently different, produce an

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

315

important barrier which alters the efficacy of the communication and should be taken into consideration by the language teacher.

> (…) any communication may be defined as intercultural. This could take us to a dead end, as it would become unnecessary to classify the communication as intercultural. The only means to clarify the situation is to emphasise the existence of an adjustment in the cultural difference. Thus, the ways of thinking, feeling and acting of different communities have more or less proximity to one another because they share, for example, the language or some elements of their life style. It is evident that the more elements these communities share, the easier the communication between them. Therefore, we can observe that at one end of the scale there would be a great difference and, at the other, the difference would be almost non-existent. In each circumstance, the intercultural communication will have different characteristics in accordance with the proximity or remoteness (Rodrigo Alsina, 2003: 77).

This focus based on comparisons between the learner's own culture and the target culture(s) and on a reflective attitude to culture difference is quite recent in the Spanish literature on ICC. With this new approach, it is no longer just a question of presenting static cultural elements according to fixed patterns that must be learned and understood. It is a matter of making pupils aware that the learning of a foreign language will give them the key to an unknown cultural universe and provide them with specific resources to avoid situations of conflict during communication. The ultimate goal aims at developing the ability to behave in a correct and flexible manner when confronted with other cultures. This implies the understanding of differences between one's own culture and the foreign culture, the acquisition of skills to be able to solve intercultural problems as a consequence of these differences and, finally, the capacity to mediate between cultures. Within this framework, the foreign language learner is viewed as an "intercultural speaker", someone who "crosses frontiers, and who is to some extent a specialist in the transit of cultural property and symbolic values" (Byram & Zarate 1997: 11). It will then be the teacher's responsibility to mediate between the native language and target language culture(s) in order to help learners achieve such goals (Byram & Risager, 1999; Edelhoff, 1993).

This is precisely why it is of utmost importance to delve into the additional knowledge, attitudes, competencies and skills required by foreign language teachers in an educational system

316

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

that tends to give priority to strictly linguistic skills. Among the studies on the acquisition of ICC through foreign language teaching, Castro, Sercu and Méndez García (2004) investigated to what extent Spanish teachers of English supported cultural and intercultural objectives. Results of data revealed that, although the majority of Spanish foreign language teachers were willing to try and attain culture learning objectives in foreign language education, they tended to prioritize the promotion of students' familiarity with the culture and the development of native-speaker-like fluency over the acquisition of an open mind. All three authors also suggested the need for a greater understanding of how to focus on intercultural communication in their own EFL classes. Moreover, they highlighted the fact that there does not seem to be a clear relationship between the teachers' beliefs and day-to-day practices, and that the latter's conceptions often shape their behaviour to a large extent and determine the success of their teaching practices.

Probably, Spanish secondary school teachers should be required to reread the works of Kramsch (1998) and Lo Bianco, Liddicoat and Crozet (1999), where it is clearly stipulated that it is now inappropriate and outdated for language learners to have as their ultimate objective that of developing native-speaker-like fluency. These authors argue that the most desired outcome in language teaching and learning should now be the "intercultural speaker" we mentioned before. It does not simply mean that a language should no longer be learnt in isolation with its cultural roots, but it is rather a new way of thinking and doing, a new orientation and perspective, which influences all decisions regarding curriculum (Liddicoat *et al.*, 2003: 57), the knowledges, understandings and behaviours outlined by Kern (2000), and the intercultural speaker strategies explained by Scarino (2000).

Our exploration of the role of the English teacher in the global age, informed by our own experience of teaching foreign languages in different contexts, has made us inquire into the necessity of studying practices in upper secondary education in the Canary Islands in order to provide insights on teachers' and pupils conceptions of the intercultural component. The ultimate objective of this reasearch would simply be to investigate and contrast the opinions and attitudes of teachers and pupils and to see how and to what extent such opinions and attitudes are reflected in classroom applications in order to eventually suggest changes in future educational policies.

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper...

317

3.   Methodology

The situation described hereabove leads us to consider the need to develop intercultural competences that favour intercultural communication and dialogue. In order to do this, we must ask ourselves: "What is our understanding of intercultural communication?" And also, "What other areas of competence are necessary to favour this intercultural communication?" These are basically the questions that have triggered this study and originated a series of questions related to the intercultural competence of A'level students in Gran Canaria. It thus becomes logical to formulate questions such as: Which competences do upper secondary school students currently possess in order to communicate with people from different cultures? Which intercultural communicative competences do these students need? Is it possible to determine these competences? Is educational intervention required to improve the competence of the students in intercultural communication? How can we evaluate the competence of the students to successfully deal with intercultural communication? Which aspects should be included in teaching programmes directed towards improving these competences? What contents, methodology, evaluation, objectives, etc. are the most adequate for these students to help improve their intercultural communicative competence? Will the competences of the students improve if we use this type of educational intervention? Which competences will improve? What unexpected contributions could this type of educational intervention produce?

All of these questions can be summarised in four questions which form the basis of this research:

- Which cognitive, affective and behavioural factors influence a bad intercultural communicative competence and where did they originate?
- How can we help the students to understand and manage the ever-changing linguistic and cultural information they are faced with and, thus, prepare them for future unknown cultural situations?
- How can they overcome these obstacles to achieve efficient intercultural communication?
- How can the teacher help the student to develop cultural sensitivity to accompany the cultural learning process?

318

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

These questions give rise to a series of general objectives in this research, which centre on two basic issues: (1) an analysis, by the teacher, of the needs in relation to teaching cultural and intercultural aspects; (2) an analysis, by the students, of the needs in relation to learning cultural and intercultural aspects.

The general objective of this needs analysis is to evaluate the internal needs of the teaching staff plus those of the students with respect to the development of intercultural communicative competence in foreign language classes in the second year of *Bachillerato* (17-18 year olds in their final year of secondary school) in the Canary Islands and, consequently, to draw up a strategy to address these needs and to propose changes to the teaching methodology.

The general objective can be defined in the following specific objectives:

- To detect and analyse the needs (difficulties, problems, inadequacies and wishes) that the teachers consider or perceive in relation to the teaching of cultural aspects and interculturality to make the students aware of the cultural diversity and help them face the difficulties or cultural obstacles which they find in the language they have chosen to study.

- To detect and analyse the needs considered or perceived by the students in relation to the acquisition of ICC in order to prepare themselves when faced with unknown cultural situations and, therefore, be able to recognise differences between cultures.

- To define the main causes which highlight the needs of teachers and students when faced with the development of the ICC and, to value their impact on the adoption of innovative methodology.

- To determine what the pupil understands by ICC.

- To implement the proposals of organization, methodology and training for the integration of a cultural component in the foreign language class and the development of ICC, according to the needs of teachers and students in upper secondary school.

Having stated the objectives and general approach to this study, we must define the methodological design of the research project. Firstly, we must define the subject of the investigation – the population that is affected.

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper...

319

The population taken into account in our investigation is, on the one hand, the English language teachers who, during the 2010-2011 academic year, will be teaching in the final year at ten secondary schools in Gran Canaria and, on the other hand, all the students attending these classes. That makes a total population of 20 teachers and 390 students involved in this study.

Taking into account the student population that answered the questionnaire, we proceeded to calculate the minimum number that, theoretically, must correspond with the sample in order for the results to be significant and generalised, according to the specific level of error (Neuber, 1980:48-9). In order to do this, we have used the formula established to calculate the size of the sample extracted from finite populations (Pascual Díez, 2000: 82), which is as follows:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot N \cdot p \cdot q}{N \cdot E^2 + z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}$$

n = size of the sample; N = size of the population; z^2 = level of confidence; [z = 2 (95.5%)]; E = desired error; p = probability of the phenomenon; q = complementary probability

Therefore, if we assume that we work with an error E=0.05, at a level of significance of 0.05 (95%, corresponds to 2 sigmas, z=2) and, in the most unfavourable case possible (p=0.5 and q=0.5), this formula has the following values and indicates the theoretical size (n) which must correspond to the sample. Considering all this data, we can apply the formula

$$n = \frac{4 \cdot 390 \cdot 0,5 \cdot 0,5}{390 \cdot (0,05)^2 + 4 \cdot 0,5 \cdot 0,5} = 198$$

Consequently, the size of the sample required to be representative of the population is n = 198 students, a figure which represents 68.27% of the English language students in their final year at these ten secondary school during the 2010-2011 academic year.

In order to obtain the necessary information about the factors that could influence the level of acquisition of ICC and external input, we decided to draw up two questionnaires: one for the teachers and one for the students.

320

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

We used simultaneous parallel processes in the drawing up of both questionnaires. A basic model divided into dimensions and subdimensions was used, to which we added two new aspects. Firstly, we sub-divided the subdimensions in order to formulate the questions later and, secondly, we decided to whom we wanted to direct the questions: to the teacher (T), the student (S) or to both groups (T-S). Thus, we were able to draw up the basic model which appears in the following table.

It is also to be noted that, when elaborating the questionnaires, we followed Liddicoat et al.'s (2003) conception of 'culture', particularly when they put the emphasis on the complexity of culture as a construct.

> Culture is a complex phenomenon. It includes the behaviours, practices, concepts, attitudes, values, conventions, rituals, lifestyles, and beliefs of the people who make up the cultural group as well as the artefacts they produce and the institutions they create (Liddicoat et al., 2003: 51).

Following the authors, we included aspects such as behaviours, concepts, attitudes, practices and beliefs, as we consider they are more important than others because of their crucial connection with the language and the learning process. The questions are graded in a way that students and teachers gradually move from items related to knowledge itself to others having to do with the modus operandi. Through this process, their answers will not only help us shed light on aspects dealing with the perception and the level of acquisition of ICC, but both students and teachers will also develop their intercultural competence by hopefully becoming aware of their 'third place' and raising questions of identities. The concept of individual identity through negotiation of a third place (Kramsch, 1993; Lo Bianco, Liddicoat and Crozet, 1999) is inherent in this questionnaire, the ultimate objective being the setting up of a place between two cultures where learners and their teachers can interact comfortably with individuals from the host culture and create identities that suit the different contexts (Liddicoat, 2002) without compromising their own identity.

Once this basic model had been prepared, we drew up separate questionnaires for teachers and students, each consisting of about sixty questions. Many of the questions are divided into a series of statements making a total of approximately 250 items. An example of this is the question set out in Table 2, which is divided into 17 items.

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper...

321

TABLE 1
**Basic model of the questionnaires for teachers (T)
and students (S)**

Subdimensions		Questio-nnaire
Personal information		
Socio-professional information	Sex	S-T
	Age	S-T
	Student's level	S
	Teacher's category	T
	Contractual situation of the teacher	T
		T
	Number of years teaching	S-T
	Academic qualifications	
Sociocultural information	Nationality	S-T
	Place of birth	S-T
	Number of years living in Spain/ Canaries	S-T
Linguistic knowledge	Knowledge of languages	S-T
	Self-perception of linguistic competence	S-T
	Linguistic usage	S-T
	Level of use of different languages in different contexts (family, university, friends)	S-T
Contact with foreign cultures	Intercultural friendships	S-T
	Leisure trips	S-T
	School trips	S-T
	Work trips	S-T
	Exchange programmes	S-T
	Visits to friends and/or relatives	S-T
	Contact through literature and/or the media	S-T
Awareness of your own sociocultural knowledge	Of your own culture	S-T
	Of a foreign culture	S-T
Diagnosis of the cognitive aspects of intercultural communicative competence		

322   ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper...

(Continuation Table 1)

Subdimensions		Questio-nnaire
Degree of understanding of communicative differences on a verbal level	Language as a product of culture Identify how verbal communication differs according to the culture Language and power Linguistic communication and ethno-linguistic variations Types of verbal communication	S S S S S
Degree of understanding of communicative differences on a non-verbal level	Identify how non verbal communication differs according to the culture Body language Paralanguage Silence Senses (touch, taste, smell)	S S S S
Degree of understanding of some of the cultural elements that influence intercultural communication	Use and understanding of time (monochronic-polychronic time) Hierarchical relationships Individual-collective values Prejudices and stereotypes	S S S S
Diagnosis of the affective aspects of intercultural communicative competence		
Motivation	General interest in the programme as a whole Interest in the cultural aspects of the programme	S S
Atmosphere in the classroom	Affective relationship with the teacher Affective relationship with the Spanish students Affective relationship with the foreign students Feeling of rejection	S S S S
Interaction management	Involvement in interaction Confidence in interaction Degree of enjoyment in the interaction Attention during interaction	S S S S

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334

323

Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper...

(Continuation Table 1)

Subdimensions		Questio-nnaire
Intercultural sensitivity	Self-concept and self-esteem	S
	Open-mindedness	S
	Non-judgmental attitudes	S
	Empathy	S
	Self-control	S
	Flexibility	S
Diagnosis of behavioral aspects of intercultural communicative competence		
Verbal skills	Use of verbal resources	S
	Overcoming linguistic barriers	S
Non-verbal skills	Use of silence	S
	Respecting personal distance (proxemics)	S
	Management of turn-taking	S
	Facial expressions (kinesics)	S
	Cultural differences of concept and use of time	
Teacher's perception of students' understanding of and attitude towards the foreign culture		
Teacher's perception of the students' attitude towards the foreign culture	Level of difficulty	T
	Motivation	T
	Prior knowledge	T
	Attitude	T
	Self-concept and self-esteem	T
	Open-mindedness	T
	Non-judgmental attitudes	T
	Empathy	T
	Self-control	T
	Flexibility	T
Teacher's observations of intercultural relationships in the classroom	Rejection and acceptance	T
	Affective relationship with the Spanish students	T
	Affective relationship with the foreign students	T
	Interaction	T

324   ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

(Continuation Table 1)

Subdimensions		Questio-nnaire
Teacher's perception of the cultural knowledge of the students with regard to the foreign culture	Daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink, etc.	T
	Youth culture	T
	Traditions, folklore, tourist attractions	T
	Literature	T
	Education, professional life	T
	History, geography, political system	T
	Other cultural expressions (music, drama, art)	T
	Beliefs and values	T
	Ethnic groups and social differences	
	International relations (political, economic, cultural) with the country of the student and with other countries	
Function of intercultural communicative competence in the foreign language class		
Perception of the objectives that influence teaching	Awareness of cultural identity and cultural prejudices	S-T
	Understanding how people from different cultures view the world	S-T
	Development of strategies and intervention techniques in multicultural contexts	S-T
The meaning of "teaching culture" in the foreign language class	General culture	S-T
	Difference civilization/culture	S-T
	Culture with a capital C (literature, and history) and culture with a small c (values, attitudes, behaviour, customs, etc.)	S-T

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

325

(Continuation Table 1)

Subdimensions		Questio-nnaire
Time given to cultural aspects in the classroom	Willingness to develop the students' intercultural communicative competence	T
	Time devoted to teaching culture	T
	Type of activities and frequency	T
	Cultural themes developed in class	T
Criteria for the selection of didactic material	Motivation	T
	Level of the students	T
	Age of the students	T
	According to the handbook being used	T
Problems for the development of intercultural communicative competence		
Problems stemming from shortcomings in training	Initial training in culture	T
	Initial training in interculturality	T
	Initial training in aspects related to didactics	T
	Initial training in aspects related to assessments	T
Problems related to the teacher's job	Lack of resources and support (information, resources, advice)	T
	Problems related to the number of students	T
	Problems related to the atmosphere in the classroom (motivation, conflicts, etc.)	T
	Problems coordinating with other teachers	T
Problems related to the evaluation of intercultural communicative competence	Assessment of the cultural component	T
	Evaluation of interculturality in the development of the programme	T
	Self-assessment	T

326   ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

TABLE 2
Question 9 of the section "Functions of intercultural communicative competence in the foreign language class" relative to the type of activities and their frequency

What kind(s) of culture teaching activities do you practise during classroom teaching time?				
	Never	Once in a while	Often	Very often
1. I ask my pupils to think about the image which the media promote of the foreign country.				
2. I tell my pupils what I heard (or read) about the foreign country or culture.				
3. I tell my pupils why I find something fascinating or strange about the foreign culture(s).				
4. I ask my pupils to independently explore an aspect of the foreign culture.				
5. I use videos, CD-ROMs or the internet to illustrate an aspect of the foreign culture.				
6 I ask my pupils to think about what it would be like to live in the foreign culture.				
7. I talk to my pupils about my own experiences in the foreign country.				
8. I ask my pupils about their experiences in the foreign country.				
9. I invite a person originating from the foreign country to my classroom.				
10. I ask my pupils to describe an aspect of their own culture in the foreign language.				
11. I bring objects originating from the foreign culture to my classroom.				
12. I ask my pupils to participate in role-play situations in which people from different cultures meet.				
13. I decorate my classroom with posters illustrating particular aspects of the foreign culture.				

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper...

327

(Continuation Table 2)

	Never	Once in a while	Often	Very often
14. I comment on the way in which the foreign culture is represented in the foreign language materials I am using in a particular class.				
15. I ask my pupils to compare an aspect of their own culture with that aspect in the foreign culture.				
16. I touch upon an aspect of the foreign culture regarding which I feel negatively disposed.				
17. I talk with my pupils about stereotypes regarding particular cultures and countries or regarding the inhabitants of particular countries.				

In most cases, we used multiple choice questions. We also carried out interviews with the teachers (qualitative approach) to understand better their perspective and their view of ICC. The items used during the interviews covered the following areas:

- The identification of difficulties teachers encounter whilst teaching ICC, and how to solve them.
- An analysis of the content of training, information and resources that each teacher believes is necessary in order to solve the difficulties. This could consist of obtaining information on ways to participate or putting into practise their solutions to problems they have identified.
- The choice of people, educational institutions or means that teachers believe can contribute to improving their preparation to resolve the problems in question.
- Each teacher, independent of his/her specific requirements, singled out the subjects which he/she considered more important to improve the teaching of ICC.
- Each teacher assessed his/her lack of training in relation to the areas which he/she defined in the previous section.
- The assessment made by the teachers as regards: i.- the need for training; ii. the ideal way to carry out this training; iii. the difficulties raised and the conditions necessary to ensure their own satisfactory participation.

328   ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

The content of the six open questions is as follows:

- Which aspects of teaching ICC do you find the most difficult? How do you try to solve these difficulties?
- When trying to solve problems do you feel you lack some type of training, information or resources? Which ones?
- Which people, educational institutions or resources could help you to be better prepared to tackle the difficulties?
- Which scientific disciplines do you consider most important in the preparation for teaching ICC? If possible, give reasons for your answer.
- Do you consider that your training should be more complete in some of these disciplines? In which ones and in which aspects?
- How do you value the need to be trained to teach ICC? If you consider this question to be basic, which would be the most ideal system? What are the greatest difficulties? What special conditions do you consider necessary for your participation in the training?

Once concluded, the process of drawing up, revising and the questionnaires to determine their validity and reliability, the final version was drawn up and distributed to teachers and students of English classes, in the final year of secondary school. A letter accompanied the questionnaires giving the necessary instructions and explaining the reasons for the research. The letter also asked for the co-operation of teachers and students and thanked those who participated.

4. Preliminary findings and results

The findings and results we are presenting here are only partial because the data is still being analysed at the moment. The questionnaires were handed out only recently and we have only had time to analyse some results that are related to the teachers. Here are our first findings, results and conclusions as to how Spanish EFL teachers in Gran Canaria perceive and try to foster multicultural awareness and intercultural communication in their language classrooms.

The participants of the present study were 20 Spanish teachers of English from different areas of Gran Canaria. They were selected randomly from public and private schools. According

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

329

to the results of the demographic questionnaire 30% of the teachers were between 22 and 34, 50% were between 35 and 49, 20% over 50. Their teaching experience was as follows: 1-10 years (40%), 11-20 years (45%) and more than 20 years (15%). 70% of the participating teachers worked at schools located in urban areas while the rest worked in rural areas or suburbs. The foreign languages taught in the schools in which teachers worked included English, German and French. They all taught between 3 and 4 hours of English per week.

The questionnaire, consisting of four main sections and fifteen sub-sections, aimed to investigate teachers' views on the role of culture in language teaching and the extent to which their current teaching practice can be characterized as directed towards the attainment of intercultural competence and a cultural approach. They were asked to respond on 5-point, 4-point and 3-point scales, depending upon the purpose of the question. Data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed by taking the frequency counts for each question.

In the first section of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to provide information about their socio-professional and socio-cultural background, about their linguistic knowledge, about the contact they had had with foreign cultures and about their awareness of their own socio-cultural knowledge. It is interesting to point out that 80% of the teachers had completed their university studies in the Canary Islands and that 70% had never lived in a foreign country for more than a month.

In the second section of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to assess their perception of students' understanding of and attitude towards the foreign culture. Generally speaking, the attributes they used to qualify their students' attitude were: tolerant, flexible, patient, appreciative of difference, adaptable, curious, open-minded, motivated and empathetic. However, they also stated their general lack of cultural knowledge with regard to the foreign culture, especially in aspects of tradition, folklore, history, geography, political systems, beliefs and value. It seems that their knowledge of the foreign culture only revolves around daily life and routines, food and drink, and some aspects of youth culture.

In the third section teachers were asked to provide information about the function of ICC in the foreign language class. The responses showed that there is a clear preference for language

learning objective and general learning skills objectives. The majority of teachers give priority to linguistic competence above cultural and intercultural competence. Their aim is that their students acquire a level of proficiency in the foreign language so they can use it for practical purposes. They make a clear distinction between language and culture, although they also state that motivation is a key aspect in their teaching methodology. However, the culture learning objective related to helping students learn about foreign cultures, and the intercultural learning objective related to developing skills to overcome obstacles in intercultural communication were ranked last.

In the fourth section devoted to problems for the development of intercultural communicative competence, it is interesting to notice that, although the analysis of the mean scores revealed that teachers thought they had some knowledge about the mentioned characteristics of foreign cultures, the great majority of them considered that they found it difficult to develop the intercultural communicative competence among their students because of problems stemming from shortcomings in their training as teachers and from the lack of resources and support in secondary schools.

As far as the students are concerned, 202 answered the questionnaire. All participants were in the age group of 17-20 years. There were 117 female participants and 85 male. As we stated before, it is still an ongoing research and the results analysis are expected to shed light on the perception and the level of acquisition of ICC by upper secondary school students in the Canary Islands.

5.   Conclusion and discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the opinions of both students and Spanish EFL teachers regarding the role of teaching culture in foreign language education and the extent to which they incorporate cultural activities into their classroom practices in order to train competent intercultural speakers.

The questionnaires have been designed in a way that they can be relevant for the research community in general, and the questions are not only applicable to the local context of the Canary Islands. The negotiation of the third place we mentioned

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper...

331

before is dynamic and entails any learner or teacher from any culture using their competency in any target language in a way that facilitates communication between cultures.

The findings of the present study are only partial because the data is still being analysed at the moment. The results we have presented here are only related to the teachers and our first conclusions show that teachers in Gran Canaria still define the objectives of foreign language learning above all in terms of the acquisition of the ability to use the foreign language for practical purposes and in terms of motivating students to learn foreign languages. They generally prioritize language teaching objectives over culture teaching objectives. They try to favour the development of openness and tolerance, but they still define culture teaching more in terms of passing on knowledge than providing intercultural skills.

With the results of this questionnaire and the students' questionnaire, we wish to demonstrate that currently the learning process of a foreign language is not complete if it does not include extra-linguistic aspects. We also intend to show that, despite the fact that there are cultural elements that are gradually acquired over time and through successive contacts with the language under study, there are many others that spring from the students' own culture, as well as others which require a much longer process to assimilate.

What is quite obvious, though, is that one of the most significant changes over the past few decades has been the recognition of the cultural dimension as a key component of language studies. According to the intercultural model, languages are related to the cultures, communities and societies that use them for communication and we, as teachers, should encourage language learners to become competent intercultural speakers (Garrido & Álvarez, 2006). For this purpose, language teachers are expected to guide students in the acquisition of various skills, contributing to the development of their knowledge and understanding of a target language and culture(s), and helping them reflect on their own culture as well. Thus, language teachers have to be familiar with what lies behind the new skills and strategies their students are expected to acquire for intercultural understanding.

Once both questionnaire will have been analysed, the final phase will be to interpret the information and assess the

332   ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

needs of both teachers and students, and the reason for these needs. This will help us to find any deficiencies and draw up proposals for solutions and procedures to develop intercultural activities to be used in the classroom. Our aim is, indeed, to offer "formulas" for the integration of a cultural component in the language class. The process of acquiring this aspect goes hand-in-hand with the study of the language. As teachers of a foreign language, we should never forget the objective of developing a cultural sensitivity in the student; in other words, draw the student closer to a reality which they may have already experienced. Sometimes, the reality will be similar and, at other times, it will be completely different. Likewise, it is not simply helping a student to understand a different culture and knowing how to behave appropriately, but that he/she develops intercultural competence. This means that the student learns to comprehend the foreign culture whilst being conscious of his/her own culture and, therefore, knows how to adopt the correct adaptation strategies. This is precisely what we understand by intercultural communicative competence. The students will be capable of communicating with their interlocutors, who have a different cultural knowledge, in such a way that they will be able to receive and interpret the message the way in which it was intended.

From the two samples, we propose to demonstrate by this research that, currently, the teaching/learning process of a foreign language is not complete if it does not include the extra linguistic aspects. From the preliminary results we have presented in this article, we also wish to highlight the fact that, in the new multicultural context of the Canary language class, teachers seem to be less prepared for cross-cultural encounters than their pupils themselves who, either in the classroom or in the schoolyard, are continuously explosed to cultures wich are totally different from their own and have to find the adequate strategies in order to deal with unusual communication situation.

6. Bibliographic references

Boletín Oficial de Canarias (BOC) nº 112, 2008 [available at http://www.gobiernodecanarias.org/boc/2008/112/015.html].

Byram, Michael, 1997: *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

ONOMÁZEIN 26 (2012/2): 309-334
Richard Clouet:
Studying the role of intercultural competence in language teaching in upper…

333

BYRAM, Michael & Geneviève ZARATE, 1997: *The sociocultural and intercultural dimension of language learning and teaching*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

BYRAM, Michael & Karen RISAGER, 1999: *Language teachers, politics and cultures*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

CASTRO, Paloma, Lies SERCU & María del Carmen GARCÍA, 2004: "Integrating language-and-culture teaching: an investigation of Spanish teachers' perceptions of the objectives of foreign language education", *Intercultural Education 15 (1)*, 91-104.

CENTRO DEL PROFESORADO GRAN CANARIA SUR, 2010: *Memoria de la programación anual. Curso 2009-2010* [available at http://www.centrodelprofesorado.com/gcsur/index.php].

COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2001: *Common European Framework of Reference for language learning, teaching, assessment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

EDELHOFF, Christoph, 1993: "English among the other European languages" in BRITISH COUNCIL (ed.): *English language learning in Europe: issues, tasks and problems*, Bratislava: ELTECS, 27.

GARRIDO, Cecilia & Inma ÁLVAREZ, 2006: "Language teacher education for intercultural understanding", *European Journal of Teacher Education 29 (2)*,163-179.

KRAMSCH, Claire, 1993: *Context and culture in language teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

—, 1998: *Language and Culture.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

LIDDICOAT, Anthony, 2002: "Static and dynamic views of culture and intercultural language acquisition", *Babel, 36(3)*, 4–11, 37.

LIDDICOAT, Anthony, Leo PAPADEMETRE, Angela SCARINO & Michelle KOHLER, 2003: *Report on Intercultural Language Learning*, Canberra: DEST.

LO BIANCO, Joseph, Anthony LIDDICOAT & Chantal CROZET (eds.), 1999: *Striving for the Third Place: Intercultural Competence through Language Education*, Melbourne: Language Australia.

MEYER, Frauke, 2000: "Wir waren, sind ein multinationales Haus" in Forschungsprojekt ikas, Universität Hamburg: *Zur Bedeutung und Aspekten interkultureller Kompetenz am Beispiel eines Dienstleistungsbetriebes, Ressourcen, Kompetenzen, Qualifikationen: Potenziale von Zuwanderern in Weiterbildung und Arbeitsmarkt*, Hamburg: Gesellschaft für Arbeit, Technik und Entwicklung, 17-26.

MEYER, Meinert, 1991: "Developing transcultural competence: Case studies in advanced language learners" in Dieter BUTTJES & Michael BYRAM (eds.): *Mediating Languages and Cultures: Towards an Intercultural Theory of Foreign Language Education*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 136-158.

NEUBER, Keith, 1980: *Needs Assessment. A model for community planning*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

PALFREYMAN, David & Dawn MCBRIDE (eds.), 2010: *Learning and Teaching Across Cultures in Higher Education*, Basingstoke, UK : Palgrave Macmillan.

Pascual Díez, Julián, 2000: *Evaluar la lengua en el aula. Análisis de necesidades del profesorado*, Oviedo: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Oviedo.

Rodrigo Alsina, Miquel, 2003: *La comunicación intercultural*, Barcelona: Anthropos.

Scarino Angela, 2000: "Complexities in describing and using standards in languages education in the school setting: whose conceptions and values are at work?", *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics 23 (2)*, 7–20.

Wiseman, Richard & Jolene Koester, 1993: *Intercultural communication competence*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Young, Robert, 1996: *Intercultural communication. Pragmatics, Genealogy, Deconstruction*, Bristol: Multilingual Matters.