

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE INTO LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Robert Godwin-Jones, Virginia Commonwealth University

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Culture has long been seen as a fundamental component of language learning. While its importance is universally recognized, there is no consensus on what the term encompasses, how culture should be integrated into language instruction, or on what role technology can and should play in that process. In this column, we will be looking at the latter issue, at the ways in which technology can support teachers and learners as they seek to understand language through culture and culture through language. In particular, we will look at the growing interest in moving beyond traditional representations of culture in the classroom (i.e., the cultural products and traditions of the target language) to the concept of intercultural communication competence (ICC), defined by Alvino Fantini as “the complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (2005, p. 1). In addition to looking at the most common approach to providing intercultural experience and learning to students—through telecollaboration—we will also look at new opportunities afforded by technological change. This will include some discussion of assessment options.

WHAT’S MEANT BY INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE?

For some time now, there has been a recognition that in language instruction culture-specific learning—focused on one particular culture—needs to be supplemented by culture-general learning: the ability to interact effectively with individuals from different cultures in a variety of contexts. What is usually referred to as intercultural communication competence was defined by Byram (1997) as a series of five *savoirs* (knowledge-abilities), as summarized by Schenker (2012): “knowledge of self and other, attitudes of openness and curiosity, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness” (p. 450). The need for this kind of competence in language learning has been highlighted by its inclusion in national standards for the United States (the [ACTFL Guidelines](#)) and Europe (the [Common European Framework for Languages](#)). Despite these official endorsements, it’s not the case that ICC has become a fixed and universally accepted component of instructed language learning. This is certainly the case in the United States, the context which is most familiar to me. I believe the situation at my home institution, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), is typical of much of American higher education. Intercultural communication competence is taught as the exclusive focus or as a major topic in courses in teacher education, mass communications, management, anthropology, international studies, social psychology, and the health sciences. Absent from this list is language instruction, although a separate [course I teach](#) on cross-cultural communication is a requirement for language majors at VCU. Nevertheless, the vast majority of students learning a language at VCU do not enroll in my course, so any specific ICC content will come from other courses or through first or second year language classes. Elements of intercultural dynamics do arise typically in these language classes, but in an incidental rather than systematic way, and these are mostly restricted to the culture of the target language.

If one were to ask a language teacher about the absence of ICC in basic language instruction, the likely response would be that it’s a important topic, but it’s just not possible to find the time to include it. Part of

the explanation can be found as well in the nature of beginning and intermediate language textbooks, at least in the United States. Culture-specific topics receive considerable treatment—often from a fairly superficial, tourist-inspired perspective—but there is typically little or no presentation or discussion of culture-general topics. The notion of a fixed national culture, aligned to political entities, with widely shared national characteristics, is normally the backdrop for the language materials presented. The topics are presented as individual facets of the culture—snapshots of everyday life, family relationships, festivals, food, and so forth—which typically require low levels of involvement on the part of students. The cultural topics don't fit together to form a coherent composite of the target culture, as Sercu (2010) comments, “It seems that what textbooks have been doing is to throw chunks of culture at learners, have them read some texts that deal with cultural topics, and hope that this cultural foot bath will eventually have a positive effect on pupils' mind-sets, and turn them into open-minded and tolerant citizens” (p. 70). Sercu argues in favor of viewing cultural learning in a scaffolding fashion, leading students to a gradually emerging understanding through case studies, critical analysis, and problem solving. A frequently stated goal of ICC is to enable learners to gain the knowledge, skills, and sensitivity to be cultural ambassadors and mediators, able and comfortable in the role of interpreters among cultures, including their own.

The language presented in basic language textbooks is almost exclusively that of standard educated speakers. Conversations are between monolingually presented native speakers who are intent on communicating information and who do so in a coherent and logical way, with rare interruptions or repetitions, while exhibiting polite turn-taking and grammatical correctness. Such dialogs provide the model speech patterns that teachers try to instill in their students. Unfortunately such human and linguistic behavior does not correspond to the real world. Linguists know well that real speech often has little to do with information exchange, and is full of repetitions, misunderstandings, formulaic exchanges, half-completed utterances, and ungrammatical sentences. Moreover, in many contexts and communities today code-switching (mixing languages) is common, as Kramsch and Whiteside demonstrate (2008).

The culturally inauthentic examples of language in textbooks are not designed to misrepresent the target culture. Rather the intent is to keep things simple and straightforward and to model accepted standard language usage. Many language teachers are likely to agree with this approach, preferring to avoid ambiguity and complexity in presenting language patterns, while emphasizing similarities and rules. Byram (2009) has argued in favor of this approach. However, in the process we instill in students an unrealistic image of the nature of language, and through classroom examples and exercises we create the impression that their own target language use should follow these patterns, often a recipe for frustration and failure. It's not just the socio-cultural and linguistic characteristics of real speech that are missing, but also any indication of its often multilingual character. Teaching German, for example, without some representation and discussion of the wide inclusion of English terms in all spheres of everyday life or without mentioning the growing influence of Turkish in youth culture is to paint a quite unrealistic picture of German language and society today. Teachers may feel that inclusion of such topics dilutes the image of the target culture, or they might not feel sufficiently informed to discuss them with students. This is clearly an area in which the integration of technology is key, providing through the Web wide access to contemporary cultural artifacts and authentic native language use. Using the Web to provide speech examples in different contexts can be important in attuning students to the idea that speakers do not have a uniform way of using language that is the same in all situations. This is likely to seem blazingly obvious to language professionals, but for monolingual students it can be a revelation, as many have never had occasion to analyze language before.

In looking at examples of real life speech, getting students to notice how their own language varies from native speaker practices can be an important step. One of those areas is how cultural functions like thanking and expressing regret are carried out. A [CARLA study](#) featured such Japanese speech acts, which were demonstrated in an introductory unit geared towards raising pragmatic awareness. Often it is the small things that native speakers do that create the feel of culturally authentic language. Sentence

intonation patterns in Russian might be one example. In German it's often the modal particles (like *ja* or *doch*) that add relatively little semantically but provide flavor, strengthening or attenuating a statement, among other possible functions. Belz and Vyatkina's study (2008) of the use of modal particles by participants in a telecollaborative project provides an excellent example of how to lead students towards more natural speech patterns. A learner corpus, accessible to the students throughout the project, highlighted the gulf between native speaker and non-native speaker use of modal particles, and gradually guided the non-native speakers to increase substantially their use of modal particles in conversations. This is an illustration of how useful it can be to provide data-driven linguistic information to learners, to highlight particularly prevalent linguistic features of the target language. It's helpful in that process to provide a more user-friendly interface to the corpus than the conventional keyword in context (KWIC) format. Liaw (2006) discusses how students in a telecollaborative project used online concordances to explore texts beyond those assigned on their own. In fact, as Boulton (2010) has shown, corpus consultation can be great tool for discovery-based learning and for the development of learner autonomy.

Blommaert (2013) points to the importance in today's world for communicative competence to include the recognition of register change and the ability to adapt to different language registers as needed (for example, in the classroom, on Facebook, at work, while drinking with friends). Canagarajah (2006) refers to this as "multidialectal competence." Learning only about standard language, according to Blommaert, "in practice means acquiring one specific and specialized register, suggested to be universally deployable in all and any social environment" (p. 3). Of course, understanding the truth of that assertion does not mean that teaching multiple variations of language patterns at elementary and intermediate levels is always possible. But it does seem possible—and desirable—at least to discuss the concept of language registers and provide examples. It seems to me that it is particularly in this area of functional language that teachers can profitably connect culture to language. That can lead to more natural second language use as well as an understanding of the socio-cultural component of language.

It's not just language textbooks that oversimplify. Many courses on intercultural communication in higher education in the United States use one of a handful of standard textbooks in the field such as Neulieb's *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach* (2012), Jandt's *An Introduction to Intercultural Communication* (2012), and Lustig/Koester's *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures* (2012). Their continued popularity can be seen in the multiple editions they have undergone, with a new edition appearing every few years. Comparing the textbooks reveals a surprising consensus on the topics covered, as well as on the overall orientation. The approach to ICC derives primarily from the work of Edward Hall (1966) and Geert Hofstede (1980). Hofstede's studies, in particular, have had great influence, with the iconic distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, and further distinctions in power distance, time orientation, uncertainty avoidance, and low versus high context communication. The staying power of this study from the 1970s of IBM employees worldwide is surprising, given the changes brought on through economic developments, increased travel, and especially through new communication technologies. The Hofstede model has been criticized as essentialism, reducing vibrant and fluid cultures to a few static characteristics, while ignoring regional, ethnic, and personal distinctiveness and cultural change (see Mader & Camerer, 2010). Nevertheless, the model is still often presented to students today with only token caveats. This seems to be less true outside the United States; European textbooks such as Holliday, Kullman, and Hyde (2010) or Huber-Kriegler, Lázár, and Strange (2003) present a more balanced approach, including a greater role for language in ICC than is typically the case in the United States.

BEYOND THE TEXTBOOK: REAL LANGUAGE THROUGH TELECOLLABORATION

It may be inevitable that textbooks oversimplify and distill complexity into simple patterns and easy to understand paradigms. Fortunately there are ample opportunities to provide alternatives to students. Many teachers have recognized that to have students work with culturally and linguistically authentic speech,

using the Internet to connect their students with groups of willing native speakers offers the best opportunity to move beyond the textbook. Telecollaborative projects have the potential for significant language learning as well as an increase in knowledge in both culture-specific and culture-general areas. In recent years, a large number of case studies have been published, which discuss the various tools and approaches (email exchange, tandem learning, discussion forums, chat sessions, text messages) from the perspective of cultural learning. None of these activities is as simple as assigning a chapter in the textbook; virtually all projects point to the important role the teacher plays in setting up and monitoring the exchange. Even with active teacher involvement, success is not guaranteed: a number of studies are forthright in discussing disappointments and failures. O'Dowd and Ritter (2006) provide an extensive list.

Most of the studies point to the need for advance preparation in order to avoid intercultural conflict and encourage deeper cultural insights. One of the techniques used goes back to the seminal *Cultura* project (Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet, 2001), the use of word associations by participants on both sides, to provide a means for self-reflection about one's own culture and to establish a useful cultural footing for the exchange. Typically, this is done by presenting terms such as *family* or *freedom* and having students write their associations. This might be done as well with pictures. The [Pangaea](#) project, for example, uses images of everyday objects and faces illustrating different emotions to create a database of labels children from a variety of cultures have used to identify the pictures. Another way to work with cultural word associations might be data virtualization such as tag clouds. Clusters of words to describe particular terms could be compared to demonstrate differences in frequency of use. A recent study in *LLT* (Baralt, Pennestri, & Selvandin, 2011) highlights the use of *wordles* (a type of tag cloud) in teaching writing, but the technique could be used in intercultural learning. Working with collocations in this way—a neglected area in language learning—could be useful as well.

In telecollaborative projects the results of word associations are used for some preliminary discussions, and are often supplemented by polls (with input on both one's own and the target culture), and discussion of shared texts or videos. There is a consensus about the importance of participants reflecting on aspects of their own culture before engaging in exchanges. Despite preparatory work, telecollaboration projects can result in misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and even reinforcement of negative stereotypes. The problems may arise from insufficient language skills, lack of knowledge of the other culture, or individual insensitivity. It's also the case that online speech lacks the paralinguistic and nonverbal clues that can be vital to understanding speakers' real intent. There are conventions in online writing to compensate—punctuation (!), emoticons (sad face), netspeak (lol) or typing in all caps (I'M SHOUTING)—but they pale in comparison to the variety and power of human nonverbal communication. One method that provides at least facial expressions and paralinguistic is to use synchronous video. Video-based language exchanges have become more common in recent years. Teletandem exchanges allow for communication that more closely resemble face-to-face conversations. Today such video-based pairing can be done with Skype or similar free or inexpensive teleconferencing tools. Typically teletandem sessions will provide both learners opportunity to practice their target language equally. At VCU, teletandem has been used extensively in [teaching Portuguese](#), with positive results. In casual conversations with Brazilian students, the American students are getting direct insight into the quite different everyday life of students in Brazil as well as a visual representation of Brazil's diversity.

However, our teletandem projects at VCU have encountered similar difficulties to those found in other kinds of telecollaboration. American students generally engage in such activities as part of a course assignment with the activity being assessed with a score or grade. In other educational settings, this may not be the case, with the result being a much more casual attitude towards the activity. Sometimes partners don't show, or don't seem to be fully engaged. While this distinction is often made in studies of telecollaborative projects, it is generally just mentioned in passing as one of the characteristics of the project, not seen as important in analyzing the exchange or interpreting the results. This ignores the affective side of language use. The higher stakes for American students is likely to affect their language

use, perhaps with an effort for greater grammatical accuracy and the use of more standard language patterns. It may affect the volume of speech as well. The important role that familiarity with the communication tools used plays in language use is likewise underrepresented in studies. The less committed participation from partners may in some cases be related to the novelty or discomfort of the experience.

Being face-to-face on screen is, of course, no guarantee of effective communication. Students may have excellent pronunciation, a good vocabulary, and a thorough knowledge of grammar, but may lack the cultural understanding to be able to decipher the actual meaning of particular utterances. This may be due to not understanding idiomatic expressions, failing to perceive contextual changes in meaning, or not recognizing tonal variations such as humor or irony. It may also be due to pragmatic transfer, the tendency to assume that nonliteral meanings of words and expressions carry across languages. Stockwell and Stockwell (2003) found that in exchanges between Australian and Japanese students both positive and negative transfer of pragmatic knowledge occurred, with some instances of pragmatic transfer leading to complaints. Speech in the language classroom is mostly decontextualized, presented without the benefit of knowing the personal, professional, or regional character of the speakers. In real world communication, cultural identities play a major role in shaping how language is used. More attention in language instruction at the intermediate and advanced levels to pragmatics, including the basics of speech act theory (i.e., how apologies, requests, disagreements are expressed), would be helpful in improving the cultural component of students' language skills as well as providing a means to decipher unexpected misunderstandings and conflicts that arise from conversational exchanges. Misunderstandings of cross-cultural pragmatics can lead to stereotypes and cultural clichés: differing expressions of politeness or conventions for using titles and honorifics, for example, can be taken as indications of general rudeness inherent in the target culture. Communication failures in telecollaborative projects can be useful teachable moments: making students aware of the dynamics of real language use can be very helpful in leading students to see the need to improve their own communication skills. Learning about the variables involved in meaning making is an important step in language learner autonomy and in knowing how to approach learning additional languages.

MOBILITY AND SEMIOTICS: NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPLORING ICC

Students may need to step back from intercultural exchanges or experiences within the target culture to reflect on the significance of the encounters. Personal or shared journals, learner logs, or blogs can play this role. Reflective journals offer a means to analyze experiences and feelings and view one's own experience in the context of other encounters or in conjunction with cohorts. Providing students with examples of blogs or journals—particularly those from students having completed a successful study abroad experience—can provide helpful modeling, to encourage moving beyond simplistic descriptions and superficial reactions. For students who are experiencing first-hand a different culture, this can be a personally disorienting and potentially disturbing experience. Given the emotional investment, it may be advisable to give students the choice of writing in their native language, while suggesting that they gradually move to more target language use. Allowing them to code-switch at will may result in more creative language use. The individualized expression of a journal or blog can be a liberating experience, allowing students both to explore cultural insights and experiment with the target language. Claire Kramsch points to the benefits of learners engaging in playful, creative use of language (2009). One might, along those lines, encourage students to write a poem or a story to express their thoughts and feelings, actions that take advantage of increasing comfort levels with the language. Likewise, use of idiomatic expressions and even of proverbs could be encouraged—wonderful ways of combining language and culture. Creative writing, such as fairy tales, can be, as Kramsch points out, a way for students to explore aspirations and potential future selves. Learning about and playing with genres is an important aspect of cultural literacy. For students with artistic inclinations, making drawings or creating comics might be of interest. License should be given to allow students to personalize and customize, following their individual interests and preference; this could be highly motivating and give students a real sense of pride and ownership.

In recent years, it has become possible for students to use mobile devices to write blog posts or journals. Comas-Quinna, Mardomingo, and Valentinea (2009) showed that students studying abroad develop greater cultural awareness through gathering information for blog posts. Such mobile blogging allows for situated learning with a more direct and immediate connection between the encounter and a blog post. Mobile devices also, whether used locally or abroad, are ideal vehicles for action-oriented language learning, which could be project-based or exploratory in nature. The use of mobile apps that record GPS determined locations, together with still images or videos taken with built-in cameras, could be used to create a narrated tour which might include brief video interviews as well. More extensive projects could involve oral history or digital storytelling. In the United States, such projects need not be done abroad, as one could quite easily (for Spanish) or with somewhat more effort (for all other languages) find native speaker interviewees for such projects, who may well be eager to share their experiences. Lee (2011) has found that these sorts of ethnographic interviews, combined with blogs, can be quite effective in facilitating ICC. Most smartphones in use today have excellent video capture quality and surprisingly good sound quality; many also provide in-device video editing. Having students produce such projects allows for individualized options and creates encounters that are likely to be both linguistically and culturally rich. One could easily imagine this as a service learning component in an intermediate or advanced language class. Deardorff (2011) provides some suggestions on how to use service learning in this way to foster ICC and points to the fact that by its nature service learning projects tend to bring students into contact with individuals quite different from them in cultural backgrounds.

Another option for using the built-in camera capabilities of mobile devices that is of particular linguistic and cultural interest is capturing signs and advertisements. Signs can not only be photographed, but with the appropriate app such as [Google Goggles](#), text can be scanned and recognized. Some apps such as [Word Lens](#), can also translate the text into other languages. This can lead to interesting cross-cultural investigations into the particular linguistic devices found, such as the use of multiple languages. English, for example, can often be found in advertisements in cultures in which it is not the first language, as a way to indicate modernity and hipness. The semiotic study of multilingual public signs and messages—particularly in urban settings—forms the basis for research in linguistic landscaping, which looks at the linguistic and cultural dimensions of language use in public spaces. Blommaert and Huang (2010) provide a fascinating analysis of a homemade Chinese sign displayed in a private home's window in Antwerp, advertising an available room to rent. The growing interest in the contextual use of language is reflected in the additional environmental terms used frequently in recent years in applied linguistics and related fields: language ecology, green grammar, geosemiotics, sustainable language learning, metrolingualism, polycentricity, supervernacularism (many discussed in a [recent posting by Jan Blommaert](#)). This is consistent with the movement away from thinking about language as having fixed cultural and linguistic boundaries and towards the idea of language arising from its local, contextualized use. This interest is reflected in recent influential studies, such as Kramsch's *The Multilingual Subject* (2009) or Pennycook's *Language as a Local Practice* (2010). The importance of context for language use is evident in the concept of *cultures of use* as a way to think about the varieties of different language forms in online writing (Thorne, 2003). As an example, Chun's recent study (2011) discusses the quite different kinds of language use evident in forum posts and chat messages.

One of the benefits of the use of mobile devices for intercultural learning is the possibility of connecting remote students (on a field trip or engaged in study abroad) with cohorts at the home location. This was one of the features of the [RAFT project](#) (remote accessible field trip) from the Fraunhofer Institute. The server-client system used in RAFT was also a key part of the [LOCH project](#) (language learning outside the classroom) from Japan in which foreign learners of Japanese were sent out in a Japanese city to find, record, and comment on particular aspects of urban life. The direct cultural experiences recorded in such projects can receive analysis and contextualization by being shared with colleagues. The contextualized encounters can then form the basis of ethnographic studies. In this way cultural immersion is used to

build a systematic view of the target culture that is based on more than one-off personal encounters which may not be culturally representative.

ASSESSMENT OF INTERCULTURAL LEARNING

In today's educational environment learning needs to be measurable in some way. That is easier to do with conventional language communicative competence than it is with intercultural learning, which is not easy to quantify. Direct measures through multiple-choice or Likert style testing can assess theoretical knowledge but may not be reliable predictors of actual performance in intercultural encounters. In educational settings indirect measures predominate, principally through self-assessment (portfolios, journals). Direct observation is not usually feasible, although depending on the situation it may be possible to obtain reports or feedback from others, such as host families, supervisors, or other participants. Relying on self-assessment can be a positive factor in encouraging greater effort in analyzing, comparing, and reflecting. On the other hand, in some cases students may not be particularly forthcoming; in other cases, they may not have enough life experience to make appropriate judgments and comments. In the United States, business communities and the health care industry—for whom cultural competence and diversity training are increasingly important—tend to prefer instruments which attempt to objectify assessment. A [listing of the various tools](#) gives a brief description of each as well as a link for additional information. Most of the instruments listed, however, are unlikely to be used in education, as they can be quite expensive. The widely used Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), for example, requires not only a payment for the test and accompanying instructions, but also a cost per person (\$10), and mandatory certification through a three-day seminar costing between \$1200 and \$1500.

Educators have developed their own instruments for local use, which in some cases they are willing to share for free. A comprehensive [report from the University of Hawai'i](#) (Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2008) provides background and analysis of these options as well as of commercial instruments. One of the free instruments is the Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC) by Alvino Fantini of SIT International, created originally for use in the Experiment in International Living. As is the case for most instruments, the AIC relies principally on self-assessment, but in contrast to most of the commercial instruments, it includes language proficiency. The AIC is designed to be used before, during and after intercultural encounters. Another assessment inventory that includes language proficiency as well is a recent European project, the Intercultural Competence Assessment (INCA), which goes beyond self-assessment to include text and video scenarios to which assessees must respond.

Most professionals advocate a multifaceted assessment plan, combining possible use of self-assessment inventories, reports from third parties, interviews, scores on summative assessments (questions based on case studies or hypothetical scenarios), and some kind of reflective writing. Input from a variety of possible sources is built into the [Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters](#) from the Council of Europe, which is in the process of adding a companion tool for incorporation of visual media. Kululska-Hulme (2010) has suggested that the Autobiography be adapted for use with mobile devices, as encounters could then be shared and discussed in real time. Renate Schultz (2007) argues in favor of portfolios to measure ICC, as they combine formative and summative assessment. She provides a template for a "Culture Learning Portfolio." A portfolio has the benefit of showing development over time. An interesting approach to ICC assessment is in analyzing status updates in Facebook from a participant in an exchange program (Lee, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2012). One could also envision evaluating tweets in a similar way, but I have not seen as yet any studies using Twitter for that purpose.

OUTLOOK

One of the difficulties in developing a widely accepted assessment instrument for intercultural learning is the necessity of agreeing on what it is that should be tested. A central question in that debate is the role of language. This is reflected in learning materials. In the most widely used textbooks in the United States

for courses on intercultural communication, language gets short shrift. One textbook's treatment of the role of language is exemplified in a chapter title: "Language as Barrier." Another mentions in passing the possibility of learning a second language, but advises that is a long and difficult process, not to be undertaken lightly. Rarely is language presented as the essential gateway to cultural understanding and a necessary (but not sufficient) means of viewing a culture from the inside. On the other hand, as discussed above, language textbooks often provide scant help for teachers who would want to include intercultural learning in their curriculum.

It's not surprising given that state of affairs, that teachers are looking to electronic means to fill the gap. In addition to conventional telecollaboration, a number of other options are available today that could be useful. Working with online media has become a wonderful source of cultural realia. Sites such as Flickr can provide alternatives to the stock photos of flower markets and castles that festoon textbooks. Ben Goldstein's book, *Working with Images* (2009), supplies both suggestions and photos, which include maps, ads, pictograms, signs, and stamps. Images can be powerful statements about cultural ownership. Which images are shown for English language learners, for example, can send very different messages about what learning this language might entail culturally and whether non-native speakers have the same ownership rights as non-natives. Showing images of English speakers in India would in that sense be quite different from using pictures of Wall Street or Big Ben. López-Barrios (2012) used images of a cultural practice likely to be familiar to his students (Argentinians learning both English and German)—barbecuing—to have students learn vocabulary and cooking practices in multiple cultures. Given the cultural significance and variation, pictures or descriptions of cooked pork, beef, horse, and so forth, could lead to intense discussions, as one recent study found (Brandt & Jenks, 2011).

Working with videos can also be fruitful. Activities that combine linguistic and cultural knowledge are video subtitling, close captioning, or transcribing. This can be done fairly easily with YouTube videos. Video mashups also are a possibility: combining and editing different YouTube videos, or creating alternative soundtracks. There have been a number of studies on the use of YouTube in language learning (for example, Brook, 2011 or Terantino, 2011) that are for the most part general how-to guides. Both these articles discuss the use of YouTube also for cultural learning. Brook, in particular, features a section on "Using YouTube to Share Local Culture" (pp. 44–46). An interesting YouTube project is [PAISAGE](#), an Irish/Spanish project for the teaching and learning of both languages, which features student-made cultural videos. It seems to me that much more could be done with YouTube, both linguistically and culturally, and it would be wonderful to see more case studies of the use of the variety of videos available (for example how-to videos, persuasive essays, music videos, personal blogs) as well as of students creating and posting their own videos. One of the areas of potential interest is nonverbal communication, something that goes missing in most online communication. YouTube videos can supplement the very nice illustrations of nonverbal behavior of native French, German, and Spanish speakers in the [Face-to-Face](#) project.

Translation is something rarely used as a teaching tool, at least in instructed language learning in the United States, despite the insights it provides into deeper understanding of the target language and culture. Having students compare results from Google Translate or other machine translators with their own or with published translations can provide surprising and informative results. Reading or translating samples from the great variety of user forums on the Web could provide both interesting cultural insights as well as valuable linguistic learning. Sources might include YouTube comments, Amazon reviews, blog commentaries, or newspaper forums. A reader's post recently to an article in the French daily *Le Parisien* provides [an interesting example](#). It's a comment about a news story concerning a four-year-old named Jihad (born on September 11th) who is sent to preschool wearing a shirt reading "Je suis une bombe" (literally meaning "I am a bomb" but colloquially "I am fantastic"). The story itself is rich in cultural contexts: Muslims in France, recent French restrictions on traditional Muslim dress in public spheres, the French tradition of laity, freedom of speech as a universal value, the role of dress in cultural identity, among others. The letter offers even richer content:

“Je m’appelle Jihad, j’ai fait des études et je n’ai aucun problème dans ma vie. Jihad n’est pas un prénom né le 11 septembre, vous êtes au courant? Il est donné depuis des millénaires. Le mot jihad à la base veut dire lutte contre ses péchés.”

My name is Jihad, I’m a university graduate and have never had any problems [with my name]. Jihad is not a name created by September 11th, did you know that? It’s been used for millennia. The word jihad means to fight to overcome one’s inadequacies. (translation from webpage)

The use of such forums designed for native speakers can be challenging for language learners, but they can be, as here, rich in colloquial language and in cultural content. For teachers to seek out such resources can be a time-consuming process. Sending students out on the Web to select materials may be a better option. Additionally, there are resources for ready-made activities such as John Corbett’s book, *Intercultural Language Activities* (2010). The [Culture Bibliography](#) from the University of Minnesota (CARLA) lists both theoretical studies and sources for classroom or online activities.

Sometimes language students question why culture should be included as a topic in a basic language class. This may be more the case in United States than elsewhere. Students tend to see culture as separate from language. That may be the case for language teachers as well, who may focus exclusively on discrete culture-specific topics. Bringing students to see the functional and socio-cultural components of language is both crucial for effective communication and fundamental to effective language learning in the future. As language teachers, we tend to focus, quite understandably, on the specific language we are teaching. In today’s world, however, the ability to learn other languages as the need arises, as well as to cope in new multilingual environments, are of great importance both from personal and professional perspectives. Businesses, according to a study by Wright (2003) are seeking new employees able to be flexible and culturally sensitive, able “to alter behavior appropriately depending on the cross-cultural context” (p. 36); as time passes, that only gains in importance. Additionally, if culture is treated experientially (particularly through direct contact with representatives of another culture) this can have a powerful motivating effect, as students see the practical benefits of increased linguistic and intercultural competence.

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RESOURCE LIST

Assessment of Intercultural Competence

- [Understanding and Assessing Intercultural Competence: A Summary of Theory, Research, and Practice](#) (an extensive discussion)
- [Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters](#) (Council of Europe)
- [INCA project](#) (Council of Europe)
- [Assessment Tools of Intercultural Communicative Competence](#) (Alvino Fantini)
- [Intercultural Training and Assessment Tools](#) (from the Intercultural Communication Institute)
- [Language On Line Portfolio Project \(LOLIPOP\)](#) (a European project)
- [Intercultural Development Inventory](#)
- [Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters](#)