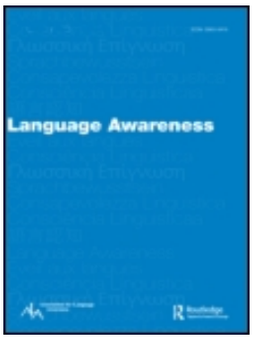

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THE ERIC HAWKINS LECTURE

Language awareness and (critical) cultural awareness – relationships, comparisons and contrasts

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The vexed question of the relationship between 'language' and 'culture' will be the starting point. I do not propose to 'resolve' the question but to consider some ways in which relationships between cultural awareness and language awareness might be conceptualised and then have some impact on language education. By 'language education' I refer to the teaching and learning of all languages in a curriculum, whether this be the synchronic experienced curriculum of a learner at a given point in time or the diachronic curriculum of their lifelong learning. I will draw on the Council of Europe's concept and platform for 'Languages in Education, Languages of Education' and plurilingual and intercultural education to provide an overview of the issues involved. Finally, I will consider the impact on teaching and learning in practice by suggesting that, in the best cases, language and culture teaching produces, through the development of linguistic and intercultural competence, alternative conceptualisations of the world and contributes to the education/*Bildung* of the individual in society.

Keywords: language awareness; cultural awareness; intercultural communication; plurilingualism

I first got to know Eric Hawkins when I was a secondary school teacher of French and German in the 1970s. I attended one of the courses he and his colleagues organised at the University of York. The course was a complex tandem-based experience. Half the participants were French teachers of English and half were English teachers of French. Sometimes we worked in French/English groups or pairs, sometimes in English-only or French-only groups. It was extremely stimulating and enjoyable, and reflected the commitment of the York team under Eric to engage directly with teachers.

My next opportunity to work with Eric came a little later but when I had just moved from teaching to teacher training and had been experimenting with work in what I later learnt to call 'language awareness', or what Eric prefers to call 'awareness of language'. Having written a short paper about this (Byram, 1978),[1] I was invited to join a working group under John Trim's chairmanship at the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT; see Donmall, 1985) which included Eric and several others. It was a wonderful experience to see how two major figures – Eric and John – worked with newcomers such as myself. They encouraged and respected what we said and wrote, and this was just another instance of how Eric quietly and gently helped people to think

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differently about languages and language teaching. As for many others, Eric Hawkins has been for me a person to emulate for his commitment to language teaching practice infused by scholarship and research.

The focus of this paper will be on the relationship between the language awareness and the cultural awareness dimension. This will include the question of criticality in language awareness and in cultural awareness, and eventually, this will lead me to make a further link between critical language and cultural awareness on the one hand and education for citizenship on the other.

The starting point for comparing language awareness and cultural awareness ought to be in the relationship of language and culture.[2] This is a notoriously difficult issue, but it has been dealt with for foreign language teaching by Karen Risager (2006). The argument and analysis are complex but it is important to note that she analyses the relationship from three perspectives:

- First, linguistic practice or the sociological perspective, where language and culture are separable – people use the same language in different contexts to refer to and express different contents – this is most evident in the use of English and Englishes but is also found in other languages.
- Second, linguistic resources or the psychological perspective where, in the life of the individual person, language and culture or, better, cultural experience, are inseparable for that individual and are ultimately unique to the individual.
- Third, linguistic system, where we might analyse and describe the grammar of a language but there is no necessary relationship to a cultural context; such a relationship is only present and created in linguistic practice.

For the purposes of comparing and relating language awareness and cultural awareness – I shall use these terms rather than 'awareness of language' or 'awareness of culture', which would be more elegant – it is Risager's first and second dimensions, the sociological and the psychological – especially with respect to matters of social identity – which are significant.

Language awareness is defined in the Association of Language Awareness as 'explicit knowledge about language and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching and language use' (Garrett & James, 2000, p. 330). This is, as Garrett and James say, a broad definition and allows a range of approaches. In the following, I will use the term to refer to a person's conscious attention to language or culture and, importantly, their engagement with these. I will return to the question of engagement later.

In the first instance, this means, following Risager, that individuals pay attention, first, to language and culture in the social context, and second, to language and culture in their own lives, in their own psychology. But it is more than paying attention. It also involves analysis of, and learning about, language and culture, and crucially the relationship between the two. In other words, someone who is 'aware' of 'language and culture' and the language–culture nexus is able to reflect on this nexus as it exists in society and in their own selves.

There is now a long tradition of teaching to develop language awareness, and there is a growing tradition of teaching to develop cultural awareness. The latter has been helped by definitions of intercultural competence, defined succinctly by Guilherme as 'the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures that we recognise as being different from our own' (2000, p. 297). The concept has been further elaborated in a range of models, many of which have been included in a categorisation by Spitzberg and Changnon in a recent

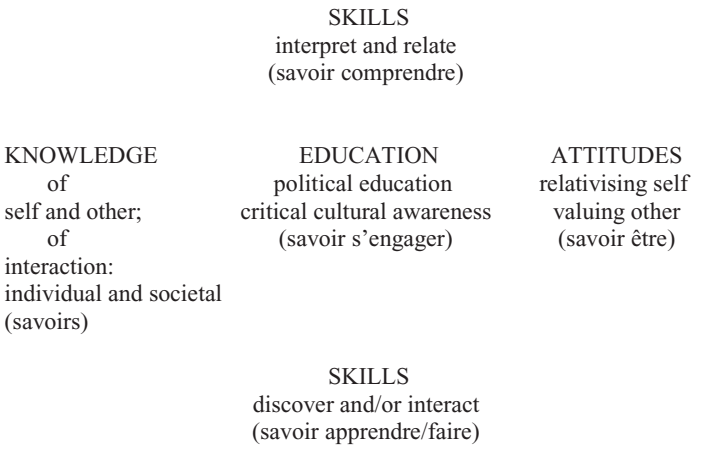

Figure 1. Factors in intercultural communication.

Handbook of Intercultural Competence edited by Deardorff. However, when Spitzberg and Changnon get to my model (Byram, 1997), what they miss in their analysis is the centrality of cultural awareness, or more exactly, critical cultural awareness. They change the diagram produced originally wherein critical cultural awareness is symbolically in the centre (Byram, 1997, p. 34, Figure 1) and simply place it around the edge of the circle (which they turn into a square), giving it the same position and significance as other aspects of intercultural competence (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 17). I will return to this when I turn later to criticality and engagement.

It is noticeable that only a small minority of the models that they analyse have explicit reference to language and language competence, and those that do, including mine, do not clarify the relationships between linguistic competences and cultural competences, the language–culture nexus, as realised in people's psychology. What we need is a model which represents language and culture competence holistically and shows the relationship between language competence – including language awareness – and intercultural competence, including cultural awareness. Such a model should be produced for pedagogical purposes, i.e. it should help teachers and learners to clarify what needs to be taught and learnt, and in such a model, the concept of awareness would be crucial. People can acquire language competence and intercultural competence without the additional dimension of awareness. In other words, they can learn a language and use it, and they can acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes which make up intercultural competence and put them into operation. They can communicate and interact successfully with people of other languages and cultures, drawing on both linguistic and intercultural competences without the extra dimension of awareness.

However, it is analysis and reflection on the social and psychological dimensions of the language–culture nexus which would create the link between their competences. For example, it would be analysis and reflection which would make them conscious of the specificity of the relationship of a language to its context, French in Canada or Cameroon as opposed to French in France for example, i.e. the sociological dimension of the language–culture nexus. Analysis and reflection would also make them conscious of the psychological significance of their own use of language, whether first, second or foreign, and reveal inter alia the significance of a language in their personal and social identity.

In other words, teachers and learners would need to include in their teaching and learning objectives the development of the ability to analyse the language–culture nexus. For example, a learner of German as a foreign language needs to be able to observe and analyse the use of German in Austria and Germany, or different parts or regions of either country. They also need to analyse their own personal 'German as a foreign language' identity – i.e. their own feelings about being a German speaker – and their social identity as foreign speakers of German – i.e. how other people perceive them when they speak German.

This notion of a foreign language identity can be exemplified from the experience of a French primary school teacher who had spent a year in Portugal teaching French but also learning Portuguese. She was moved to reflect on this in a research interview – one indication of how being involved in research can be part of the individual's personal development or *Bildung* – and this is what she said:

> I came home by train and when I arrived at the station in Bordeaux, I needed some change to leave my case at the left luggage office. I went to get some change at a newspaper kiosk and I heard myself speaking as I would have done before, saying 'Good morning, I wonder if you could give me some change.' In other words I heard myself speaking in a way that I didn't in Portugal because I hadn't reached that level in language, that level of complexity, which I have in French. And when I heard myself speak with this kind, this level of language, I wasn't the same person any more, and I really felt at that moment that in speaking a language, there are important issues of personality. Hearing myself speak French, it was no longer me, the person who had lived for eleven months in Portugal, it wasn't me speaking. I had this French language which was part of (lit. inscribed in) me, but it wasn't me who was speaking. So then I lived for about two weeks re-teaching myself the French language which had left me, but the form of it was no longer the same. For two weeks I really felt strange, just because of using the language, and the values which I had to draw from it.
>
> I think you have to live through that experience to understand it. There really is no transfer possible from one language to another. In fact I had thought, . . . the courses I had done at school had given me the impression there is, that it's a code which you decode. But it doesn't work like that at all. (Byram, 1996, p. 92)

It is evident that she has acquired a Portuguese-speaking identity during her experience, which is different from her French-speaking identity. Her explanation of her French-speaking identity is very telling: it is 'inscribed in' her ('*inscrite en moi*' in the original). But it is also evident that she does not simply take up her old identity when she begins to speak French again. Her new relationship with French is influenced by the language learning experience she has had in Portugal, an issue which could be pursued in more detail as has recently been done by researchers interested in learners' narratives (e.g. Kramsch, 2009; Oxford, forthcoming; Todeva & Cenoz, 2009).

Her final remarks are the important ones for this paper and a challenge for language teachers. In her language learning in schools, she had not understood the nature of language; she had understood it as a word-for-word encoding of French. A language is, as those who are 'aware' know, not a code, and it is surely the task of language awareness work to ensure that in the course of language learning – first, second and foreign languages – the learners should come to understand this. But in addition, language awareness work should stimulate reflection on the question of the relationship between languages and identities, in ways which only became clear to this teacher after a year of learning outside the classroom. How this is to be done inside classrooms is a topic for another day but techniques and methods already exist.

Language and cultural awareness thus include social analysis – the use of language in society – and self-analysis, analysis of the significance of language and culture for the

self. The former has been well developed under the labels of critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) or critical literacy (Janks, 2000). It might be noted in passing however that less critical attention has been paid to the psychological aspect of language awareness.

But I want to focus here on critical cultural awareness. My definition of this is:

> An ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in our own and other cultures and countries. (Byram, 1997, p. 53)

The reason I put this symbolically in the centre of my model of intercultural competence (*pace* Spitzberg and Changnon) is that it embodies the educational dimension of language teaching. Skills, attitudes and knowledge, both linguistic and cultural, can be taught and learnt without critical awareness, but that can be done anywhere by anyone, including those who commercially train or prepare people to live and work in another country.[3] Adding critical awareness – both linguistic and cultural – ensures that attention is paid to learners' education, to that evolution of the self-encapsulated in the notion of *Bildung*.[4] Without this dimension, language teaching does not contribute to its full potential to education or *Bildung*, and it is the notion of criticality which makes the difference.

Before moving on however, let me note that, as in critical language awareness, my own focus in critical cultural awareness does not apply sufficient attention to the psychological, to the questions of personal and social identities and their relationships to culture. There is a need for learners and users of foreign or second languages to reflect critically on their identities. All I can offer on this is the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters*, recently published by the Council of Europe (www.coe.int/lang).

Let me now come back to the concept of engagement. In a paper from 2009, Svalberg argues:

> A shared concern … of LA practitioners and researchers, is the notion of *engagement with language*. As collectively constructed over the last 15–20 years, LA does not refer to a purely intellectual awareness and is not passive … LA both engenders engagement with language and is constructed through it. (2009, p. 242)

Svalberg goes on to say that she is interested in 'engagement' with respect to the light it might shine on learning processes, but as she says 'engagement can be intellectual, affective, social or political, or a combination' (2009, p. 242) and I want to focus on the social and political.

In my labelling of the different elements of intercultural competence, I used both French and English. For the French label, I deliberately chose the term '*savoir s'engager*' because of the political overtones of the French word 'engagement'. I had also drawn upon the tradition of *politische Bildung* in the German education system. The definition does not however include this political dimension as much as it might or, I now think, as much as it should. For the evolution in the last decade of *politische Bildung* into *Demokratielernen* (Himmelmann, 2004) in Germany, and the increased presence and status of citizenship education throughout the world, and its particular form of education for democratic citizenship in Europe, have all offered new opportunities for language teaching of all kinds, whether first, second or foreign. For what is important about citizenship education is that it aims to lead learners to critical engagement in their communities, to take action in the here and now, inside and outside their schools and universities.

To illustrate this, let me take a statement about citizenship education in England which was to be found on the website of the ministry responsible for education when the subject first became obligatory in the national curriculum:

Citizenship education has three related purposes:

(1) *Social and moral responsibility*: Learning self-confidence and socially and morally responsible behaviour.
(2) *Community involvement*: Becoming involved in the life of neighbourhood and communities, including learning through *community involvement* and *service* to the community.
(3) *Political literacy*: Learning about the institutions, problems and practices of our democracy … how to *make themselves effective in the life of the nation* – a concept wider than political knowledge alone. (emphasis added; retrieved January 2005 from http://www.ncaction.org.uk/subjects/citizen/index.htm)

What is new here is the emphasis on community involvement, on active citizenship and on social agency. This echoes what is said in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* about the learner as a social being or social agent (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9):

> The approach adopted here, generally speaking, is an action-oriented one in so far as it views users and learners of a language primarily as 'social agents', i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action. While acts of speech occur within language activities, these activities form part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning.

Taking a citizenship education perspective makes clear what 'a wider social context' can include.

However, social agency does not necessarily lead to *critical* engagement. Neither the CEFR, which is an inter-governmental document,[5] nor schools maintained by a state will easily or lightly encourage critique of the communities within a state, or of the state itself. Critical awareness is different; it implies critique, both political and social, as the critical discourse analysts have often demonstrated.

Critical cultural awareness extends this focus on language explicitly to other dimensions of a culture. Furthermore, critical cultural awareness includes a critique of our own communities and societies as well as that of other countries. It does this because foreign language learning inevitably draws attention to other countries, where the language being learnt is spoken, and to the communities and society of those other countries.

In short, citizenship education leads to active engagement with the world here and now in our own state and society or some part of it. Foreign language education which includes criticality could and should lead a stage further, to critique, engagement and social action, beyond our own state and society.

Precisely, what critical engagement should mean and what forms it can take has been described in great detail by Barnett (1997) in his analysis of the purposes of higher education, and this can be used also in secondary education. His argument is complex and summary risks misrepresentation and simplification, but briefly, he (Barnett, 1997, p. 65) conceptualises criticality along two axes of domain and level. Three domains exist: knowledge, self and world, which are summarised as follows:

- propositions, ideas and theories, especially as they are proffered in the world of systemic knowledge;

- the internal world, that is oneself, a form of critical thought that is demonstrated in critical self-reflection; and
- the external world, a form of critical thought that is demonstrated in critical action.

There are four levels of criticality: critical skills, reflexivity, refashioning of traditions and transformatory critique.

In recent decades in critical language and cultural awareness, we have focused on 'critical skills' and 'reflexivity', rather than the activity involved in challenging traditions and developing what he calls 'critique-in-action'. How an approach which gives more attention to critique-in-action in language education can be realised in schools and universities is made more concrete in the work of theorists and practitioners of citizenship education. Gerhard Himmelmann (2003, 2006) has provided an approach by defining the competences involved, and in a recent book (Byram, 2008), I have shown how these overlap with but can also be extended by the various elements of intercultural competence. The notion of intercultural citizenship which arises from this combination is intended to give an active citizenship dimension to foreign language education – a dimension which is critical and also goes beyond the exclusive focus on learners' own country that we find in citizenship education in national education systems.

In conclusion and summary, the purpose of this lecture has been to emphasise the following: first, the complementarity of language awareness and cultural awareness has to be realised both in the social, in linguistic practice, and in the psychological, in the linguistic and cultural identities of individuals.

Second, the notion of awareness is crucial in ensuring that linguistic and cultural learning are not only useful and operational but also educational, and contribute to *Bildung*.

Third, criticality, in both language and cultural awareness, is fundamental both to language and culture education and to education for citizenship, or *politische Bildung/Demokratielernen*.

Fourth, language and culture education and citizenship education can and should complement each other; the former bringing an international and intercultural perspective, while the latter bringing an emphasis on social agency to be realised in the here and now. Combining these two perspectives ensures that the 'here' is not just 'our community and country' but intercultural, and that the focus is on language and culture learning for 'now', and not just for some future application in the so-called real world.

Finally, all of this needs further development and construction on the basis of all the good work done in the name of both cultural awareness and, to use Eric Hawkins' phrase, 'awareness of language'.

Notes

1. In seeking to develop general linguistic ability, the teacher will attempt among other things to make his (sic) pupils consciously aware of the phenomenon of language and its workings. He will want to help his pupils to knowledge of certain truths concerning the phenomenon, to understanding of certain relationships between that phenomenon and other aspects of human behaviour. He will be concerned above all with the foreign language and will not neglect to teach the pupil to use the language, but he will also by extension be helping the pupil towards a conscious knowledge of his own language and its nature as an example of the general phenomenon (Byram, 1978, p. 206).
2. Both 'language' and 'culture' are difficult concepts to define in the abstract. Language teachers and other linguists however are usually happy to be pragmatic and 'define' by use and refinement of use where necessary; teachers of German understand each other when they speak of 'teaching the German language' for example. There is often more concern to attempt to define 'culture'

perhaps because language people are new to the concept, but it can be treated just as pragmatically. My own shorthand is the phrase 'beliefs, values and behaviours' shared by a social group, whether permanent or transitory.

3. The teaching/training of attitudes is a complex matter with difficult ethical dimensions, but is the one which is commonly addressed by techniques of experiential learning in commercial training. The attitudes I refer to in my model are those of curiosity rather than positive feelings about others, and the teaching task in this case is that of stimulating curiosity, a task which those working in general education are familiar with.
4. The concept of *Bildung* is complex but is introduced in a special issue of *The Journal of the Philosophy of Education* by Løvlie and Standish (2002, p. 318) as follows: 'In a fragment published as the *Theory of Bildung*, Wilhelm von Humboldt states that *Bildung* is about linking the self to the world in "the most general, most animated and most unrestrained interplay". And he goes on to describe the interaction between the student's inner powers and capabilities and the external world in terms that reverberate through the literature on education in the following centuries: thus it is crucial that the student "should not lose himself in this alienation, but rather should reflect back into his inner being the clarifying light and comforting warmth of everything that he undertakes outside himself" (von Humboldt, 2000, p. 58ff). The practical aim of *Bildung*, then is to strengthen the student's innate powers and character development'.
5. Since the CEFR is a European instrument for specifying teaching, learning and assessment options, leaving to member states the decisions about what is to be taught, learnt and assessed and how, it might be expected to remain neutral on the context and operationalisation of social agency. On the other hand, the Council of Europe pursues activities to promote education for democratic citizenship (EDC) and it might be expected that the purposes of CEFR could be combined with those of EDC. This has been attempted in the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* where analysis leads to commitment to action.

Notes on contributor

Michael Byram taught languages in secondary school and adult education. At Durham University since 1980, now Emeritus, he has researched the education of linguistic minorities and foreign language education. His most recent book is *From Foreign Language Education to Education for Intercultural Citizenship.*

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