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Cross-cultural skills – crossing the disciplinary divide

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Abstract

Courses in cross-cultural communication and in "foreign" languages, in Australian universities at least, often fail to communicate across institutional and disciplinary barriers. Starting from an analysis of two courses in intercultural communication, this paper examines how they foreground cultural difference and where they locate it in relation to the classroom. This analysis raises a number of issues of relevance to the teaching of culture within "language courses." The affordances of this interdisciplinary approach are explored with particular reference to the teaching of French.
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1. Introduction

Not too long ago, in a galaxy not too far away, one of the authors of this paper attended a university seminar on internationalization of the curriculum. A 'language teacher' investigating the teaching of language and culture, she was distressed to learn that a recent survey of the university's offerings relevant to cross-cultural communication had ignored all language units. When the speakers concluded with a call for examples of 'good practice' to be presented at a subsequent seminar, our

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heroine saw a chance to pitch a story about an innovative exchange programme in France. Hurrying to the front, she evinced polite surprise that no language unit had been surveyed. Rather more sincere surprise was reciprocated at the notion that such a unit might be relevant. The exchange programme was suggested as a case study. 'Ah' was the answer 'but what do you do to prepare your students to go to France?' 'I teach them French for four semesters.' 'Yes, but what do you do to prepare them to go to France?' 'I teach them...' Etc.

Within Australian universities there are many examples of the promotion of study abroad opportunities and an emphasis on equipping students to prosper in an era of globalization and multiculturalism. In this climate of institutional enthusiasm for internationalization of the curriculum, the patchiness of support for language teaching can seem particularly inexplicable. While language teachers might have considered as their almost exclusive purview the development of communication skills relating to other cultures, the beneficiaries of this zeal for internationalization have in general not been language units, but rather non-language-based courses in intercultural communication.

This paper takes its traction from the paradoxes of a situation where, in the discourse of language teaching, culture has joined language in an apparently indissoluble union, whilst elsewhere in universities that partnership is annulled as language courses are deemed curiously irrelevant to the teaching of intercultural communication skills. While the specifics of our analysis and to some extent the uptakes of it are dictated by the local context, the separation between courses in (intercultural) communication and in language is not a peculiarly Australian issue (see Hall, 2002; Kelly and Tomic, 2001): the discussion and our attempt to cross this disciplinary divide therefore have wider significance.

Our introductory anecdote does more than exemplify this belief that language courses are irrelevant to in-country experiences and, presumably, any other point of 'real' intercultural communication. While it is tempting to lament the incident and discount the assumption that French units would somehow provide no preparation for study in France, we should not write off that nagging question: how do we prepare our students to go to France? In one study which deals with the issue, de Nooy and Hanna (2003) investigate the PRA (periods of residence abroad) experiences of 40 Australian tertiary students of French. From the students' accounts, it must be concluded that whatever the merits of the language programmes which preceded their departures, in many ways they were *not* prepared for cultural differences encountered during PRA (in the study in question, for culturally determined patterns of information distribution). Here again there is reason to suppose that the limited nature of the cross-cultural competence acquired through university language courses is not specific to the Australian situation (cf. Kelly and Tomic, 2001, p. 2).

This paper starts with an analysis of two units in cross-cultural communication (which for purposes of economy of expression we will oppose to "language courses") offered by a Faculty of Business. Showing our hand from the outset, we declare our interest as language teachers, or, as we would prefer to say, as teachers of language and culture. Despite our evident disciplinary loyalties, the object is not to demolish the courses studied in order to demonstrate some inferiority to language units which,

victims of bean-counting administrators' muddleheadedness, undeservedly languish in an underfunded wilderness. Rather, we ask if language teachers themselves have a case to answer, or at least something to learn. Perhaps we have not always positioned ourselves to contribute to the teaching of cross-cultural skills, either because 'culture' is seen purely in terms of content, or because, confident that language and culture cannot be put asunder, the acquisition of the latter is seen to proceed automatically from the learning of the former, and the whole question of *inter*cultural skills does not present itself. Our account of these courses sets up a discussion of what it means to teach cultural or intercultural skills in a language classroom. Specifically, we use their contrasting approaches and difficulties to discuss the question of the location of cultural difference.

2. Two case studies

The two units were selected on the basis of outlines provided on-line to students prior to enrolment. Both were presented as transcending the usual model of business subjects, described as the provision of facts on countries with which one might do business. Rather, these units claimed to provide students with the *experience* of communicating cross-culturally, their stated goals and objectives therefore including the development of skills, as opposed to the acquisition of head knowledge. This emphasis on skills and on cross-cultural *performance* held the promise of cross-fertilization for our language courses. We supposed that it would ensure methods and philosophies close to those of language classes, and indeed, to the kinds of language classes where attention is given to cultural competence and where cultural competence, rather than being the recitation of historical facts, is understood as something like surviving a dinner party, with the minimum of social discomfort, or the no less arduous ordeal of purchasing stamps. This first impression of possible kinship with language units was confirmed by discussions with the lecturers concerned. Some methods of teaching were well known from language classrooms: interactivity, role-plays, interviews with 'native speakers.' In addition, both units included observations of 'cultural events' (for example, Chinese New Year, or the city's annual Greek Festival). The reflective and theoretical aspects of the courses were something new to our experience.

We came to these courses from a long diet of language textbooks and articles where the teaching of cultural skills arose only through their affiliation with linguistic ones and so were familiar with the tropes of culture as, say, the specular image, the linked but separate domain, the Promised Land to which language leads (see, for example, Crozet and Liddicoat, 2000; Galisson, 1991; Kramsch, 1993.) It seemed promising to look at courses where you could cut to the chase and get down to some work on cultural skills, which we at first understood to be conceived of pragmatically. As it turned out, the major skill taught was recognition of the *fact* of cultural difference – which would have been fine, if the kinds of difference students were taught to recognize had not been so limiting.

The two units examined will be referred to as A and B, summarized in Table 1. Our study involved regular observation of and participation in the weekly classes.

Table 1
The two units

Unit A	Unit B
Undergraduate unit	MBA unit
Mainly first year business students	Mainly postgraduate MBA students, many with professional experience
Approximately 35 students	Approximately 15 students
Students mainly white Australian, this taken to be the defining background of the class	Students from a variety of backgrounds, this variety taken to be defining of the classroom
Teacher-centred format, with some group work	Very high degree of student participation: presentations, group work, group discussion, role plays, etc.
Emphasis on observation and choice of appropriate theory to use in reporting on observations	Emphasis on participation and reflection
Assessment	
Book review of an account of a cross-cultural experience	Group presentations on a chapter from Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997)
Ethnographic study	Major project: study and interview
Study of a cross-cultural situation	Participation (students also performed ungraded "country presentations")[a]

[a] These were relatively informal presentations, by individuals or groups, of "their" country – that is, a country of which they had more experience than their peers. These interventions provided the country-specific content of the course, and might involve food tasting, historical documentaries, identifying the flag, even learning a few greetings in a language of the country.

Descriptions are also based on the unit outlines and reading lists provided to us by the unit coordinators, and on discussions with them.

We have chosen to present in Table 1 a set of differences. Obviously some of these produced difference in course content, but the extent of this variation proved surprisingly great for two units whose reading lists included many of the same texts, and whose aims and objectives were almost identical. How could two courses so alike in pedagogical objectives and theoretical assumptions be so very different? The answer lies less in what they conceived culture to be, but in where they found it. This further leads us to wonder where language teachers locate culture for their students.

3. What is culture?

We begin by asking 'what is culture?' since where we look is determined by what we're looking for.

3.1. Definitions of culture: Unit A

Because the undergraduate unit aimed to be a survey course, the set explanations of culture did not form a consistent whole, and no particular theorization of culture was recommended over others. This does not mean however, that there was no stable

operational definition of culture, for classroom practice pointed to a number of constant assumptions. Firstly, just about any set of practices was taken to indicate the existence of a culture (café culture, tattooing culture, shopping culture). There was therefore a useful confounding of student expectations that this would essentially be a course about national cultural difference, and of their secondary assumption that understanding cultural difference was only relevant to the international business scene. Secondly, however, these cultures were conceived of as subsets of what was called 'mainstream culture,' but were problematically held to be subsets in an oppositional, rather than a constitutive way. But what would be left of mainstream culture if its components were removed? After all, if one plucks away at a bunch of grapes, isolating each separate grape, the cluster disappears. The subcultures were, still grape-like, oppositional to each other in that there was no conceptual room for overlap between and amongst them. This oppositionality conferred on them their relevance to a course on cross-cultural communication, but if the course never really wondered how the subcultures hung together, neither did it pose the question of how the mainstream and the margins, nor the various subcultures, communicated with each other.

It was furthermore assumed that these cultures could be investigated as coherent forms, through study based on observable reality and critical distance. The classroom was the privileged locus of critical distance, in ways to be discussed shortly, and cultural difference within the classroom, and the constitution of the class as a culture in itself, were given little attention.

3.2. Definitions of culture: Unit B

Culture comes in layers, like an onion. To understand it you have to unpeel it layer by layer (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997, p. 6).

If grapes (unconsciously) provided the model for culture in Unit A, Unit B drew on the foundational metaphor of onions, which Trompenaars represents (in cross-section) as a series of concentric circles (see Figure 3.1 Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997, p. 22). The objective of this unit was to learn to exfoliate the perceptible manifestations of culture ("artifacts and products"), to peel away the layer of "norms and values," to discover the core (the botanical exactness of the metaphor deteriorates somewhat at this point), for cores were taken to be generalizable to and explanatory of the behaviour of individuals belonging to different cultures. In contrast to Unit A, this course in cross-cultural communication for international business first and foremost aligned difference with nationality. The cores were described in terms of the set of dimensions presented by Trompenaars (and Hampden-Turner) in *Riding the Waves of Culture*, [1] students themselves introducing the categories chapter by chapter, in tutorial presentations. An unfortunate consequence of this linear approach was the deferral of the final chapters added to the revised second edition, those dealing with

[1] Students used both the first and second, co-authored, editions.

'diversity *within* rather than *between* countries' (1997, p. ix). Thus for the course, the 'dimensions' were opposed and discrete categories into which national groups neatly fell. Class after class, as each pair of oppositions was introduced, we were induced to identify with one or the other pole, middle positions being excluded. And since difference in the classroom was the linchpin of its functioning, there was an exaggeration of national difference, and little place for notions of national and cultural mixity. Hence the student whose childhood arrival in Australia as a Vietnamese refugee dated from 23 years earlier represented Vietnam, rather than the equally instructive viewpoint of the person with multiple cultural memberships. This repeatedly imposed binary division of the class meant that the variety of national cultures present tended to collapse into larger categories: East and West. [2]

3.3. Cultural difference and differentiation

Both units defined cultures as grounded in values driving all their members, in all contexts, thus precluding any cultural mixity – so much so that any discussion of the intercultural was systematically excluded.

A reported experience from an earlier MBA cohort further demonstrates the unremitting push towards cultural differentiation. Previous classes had contained larger groups of Indian students, identified as belonging to distinct cultures: Northern Indians, Southern Indians, men and women. Student presentations of these cultures were scheduled on different evenings. On the one hand we might applaud this recognition of and sensitivity to sub-national cultural diversity. On the other, by separating them out, and structurally opposing Northern and Southern India to each other in the same way as, say, Zimbabwe and Korea, the opportunity was lost to see how these cultures coexist and might model cross-cultural relations, successful or otherwise.

Continual subdivision reproduces homogeneity: the well-intentioned desire to recognize cultural difference ensures that difference is always kept at bay. The multiplication of categories produces a potentially infinite number of undifferentiated sets – and no cultural difference within their borders. Whether culture is figured by grapes or by onion rings, there is no space for the examination of cultural mixity, and under neither of these dispensations were students required or encouraged to do anything other than border patrol.

And for both units, language, if mentioned at all, was merely an *expression* of cultural difference, along with architecture, dress and diet.

4. Where is culture?

We now turn to the location of culture by these units, both of which set students the task of finding and analysing cultural difference.

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[2] The effect of this insistence upon unique cultural allegiance may be seen in another student. Introduced in the first class as 'Australian, of Chinese origin,' by late in semester she self-identified as Chinese.

4.1. Unit A: window on the world

It was initially curious that this unit, where a seemingly infinitely differentiated taxonomy of cultures was discussed, maintained for so long the fiction of the class as a culturally homogeneous group. While particular students might be called upon to provide 'other' perspectives (e.g., what it is to live in the EU), such moments remained exceptional, and the typical classroom discourse was a dogged insistence upon similarities: all, lecturer and observer included, were *X Files*-watching members of Generation X, *au fait* with the Spice Girls and consumers of Coke (or was it Pepsi?)

We suggest that this insistence on homogeneity was consistent with the role the classroom served as a meta-space, a place of reflection. The traditional academic model was thus reinforced by a model of ethnography in which distance was seen to preserve the data from contamination. Cultural difference and its problems had to be effaced as far as possible in the classroom, in order for it better to serve as the space of distanced reflection and analysis of what happened 'out there' in the world of cross-cultural contact.

We further suggest that this has been the traditional model of French classes in Australian universities: inside the classroom, a culturally homogenous group studies the equally homogenous French culture.

4.2. Unit B: the world in the classroom

The catch phrase used of the MBA class, 'the world is in the classroom,' signalled a contrasting approach: no longer was difference pushed beyond the walls, or unwillingly allowed to infiltrate – here, rather, the experience of the course (and experience was to count for more than anything) turned on the existence of difference within the classroom, difference which, as seen above, had to be produced on demand, despite other viable attributions of identity.

This immersion model explicitly situated students within a cross-cultural context. For example, creating the groups responsible for the expositions of Trompenaars was a carefully managed activity, with each team required to instantiate 'diversity.' Performance of their presentations supposedly evidenced successful cross-cultural communication. In conjunction with this, the students' major project required them to search for cultural difference outside the classroom, to interview members of other cultures. As is often the case with such projects, many students saw their interviewees not only as members, but also as representative, of those cultures.

5. What are cross-cultural skills?

What then were the 'cross-cultural communication' skills with which students in these courses were equipped? On our analysis, these skills involved:

- finding culture,
- making contact with culture,

- experiencing, and being transformed by, an *appreciation* of cultural difference (not culturally, but morally transformed, as this knowledge would free students from the ignorance from which racism is supposed to proceed),
- analysing the experience,
- reporting observations.

What these communication skills apparently did not involve in any way worth dwelling upon was language: dethroned as the sole component of communication, it now seemed devoid of interest. This cross-cultural training, then, enabled students to show cultural sensitivity in dealing with foreigners, while using languages already at their disposal, predominantly English (conceived of as the language of international business). Unit B, with its large proportion of non-native speakers of English, modelled how such cross-cultural communication might happen: it was starkly obvious that not all students mastered English to the same extent, but linguistic difficulties were politely, sensitively, ignored. The models of 'white multiculturalism' (Hage, 1998, see also Crozet et al., 1999, p. 2) or monolingual interculturalism (Hall, 2002, p. 79) prevailed.

Now, if the issue of linguistic competence (in whatever language) had not been occluded, if the units had explicitly recognized their inability to predict the languages their students might need, and their inability to provide instruction in those languages, the units could have found credible ways of equipping students to deal with linguistic incompetence in contexts in which there was no lingua franca, teaching for instance the skills and etiquette required for working with interpreters, and how these vary cross-culturally (cf. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997, pp. 60, 109–110).

At first sight one might suppose that this attitude to language is what radically distinguishes these two courses in intercultural communication from language courses: in the former, linguistic difference is a superficial marker of cultural difference, in the latter, it is as if cultural difference proceeds from linguistic difference (and indeed as if the fact of a shared language ensured a shared culture).

However, ironically, this reluctance to deal with the reality of linguistic incompetence is also typical of language courses. Textbook role models of native speakers or improbably skilful non-native speakers rarely train students to cope with their linguistic shortcomings in helpful and culturally appropriate ways. Teaching students from early on to request clarification, or repetition, or a decrease in speed or indeed the use of an interpreter should not be viewed as sanctioning lesser levels of achievement, but as maximising the usefulness of their foreign language skills.

The element common to the two kinds of courses is an unwillingness to face the difficulties of contact, and what they mean for the realities of performance *in situ*. If we now return to the list of cross-cultural communicative skills, we see that it is not just language which is missing, but in fact any skills to do with discernable cross-cultural *performance*. Although students in the Business units were involved in communication with members of other cultures (for their ethnographic studies, for example, or their group projects), what were displayed and judged were the final products, rather than the processes. While students asserted that they had become more able to communicate cross-culturally, there was minimal on-going reflection on

the ways in which they negotiated difference. Rather, the recurrent theme was that from intellectual understanding sprang sympathetic understanding. Strategic use of those understandings was on the whole neglected, no doubt because perfected intellectual understanding and tolerance were viewed as intrinsically desirable and holistically transformative of naturally racist individuals. Hence, although students were initiated into a knowledge of cultural deep structures, a modest veil was cast over the mechanics of the cross-cultural act itself.

6. Where do we go from here? Lessons for language teaching across the disciplinary divide

It should by now be clear that the negative aspects of our critique are no knee-jerk reaction against the neglect of language, but are predominantly a response to the models of culture embraced by the two units examined. Without assuming that they represent all courses in cross-cultural communication, we contend that the problems these units exemplify (and indeed the solutions they propose) are of wider relevance. We turn then to consider what those whose primary allegiance has been to the teaching of language might learn from them.

Let us return momentarily to the opening anecdote, with the seminar presenter's perception of the inadequacy of language courses. Our French teacher expected some variation on the theme of the unhappy post-study trip to France, with the standard motif 'then I went there and couldn't understand a thing.' But rather than targeting linguistic underpreparedness, the presenter's concern about the institution's French courses was 'whether they teach students to be Australians in France.' Using for the moment 'teaching students to be Australian in France' as shorthand for 'teaching students in Australian universities to communicate cross-culturally with francophone interlocutors,' we explore two sets of impediments which stand between language courses and compliance with this model.

6.1. *To be Australian…*

The first derives from the principle that the only available goal for the learner is native-like performance. [3] A rigorous application of this model perpetuates the ideas of cultural homogeneity and non-mixity problematically displayed in both units studied and paradoxically suggests that cultures cannot talk to each other. That is, if the learner can only speak as a more or less successful reproduction of a native, it is as if there is no place for the foreigner, nor any way in which cultures already have ways of categorizing and dealing with the foreign (see Freadman, 1999). Yet cultures do cope with more or less proximate others, in ways which cannot be accounted for either by the grape or the onion models. On this point, without denying the

[3] Such a view is of course symptomatic of the spy metaphor for language teaching, which we have discussed in greater detail elsewhere: Cowley (2003), Hanna (1996, 1998).

usefulness of taxonomies of cultural difference such as those suggested by Trompenaars or Hall (1977), we suggest that knowledge of these is not enough. Rivalling these categorizations, with their claims of pan-cultural objectivity, are powerful sets of locally accepted stereotypes. While knowledge of the more scientific accounts of cultural difference can help me understand what is happening if, say, as an individualist I find myself across the negotiating table from a communitarian, I also need to know how my interlocutor—who may not have the benefit of a course in cross-cultural communication – is categorizing me in return, and if I have arrived at negotiations already understood as hypercasual or obsessive, ignorant or arrogant, tolerant or endemically racist (the latter trait being part of the stereotype of Australians which prevails in many cultures). With respect to the tenacity of certain stereotypes and their conceptual organizing power, we have found it useful in class to refer to Christine Béal's investigations of Franco-Australian relations in the workplace. Students familiar with Australian commonplaces about 'The French' easily understand that the label 'arrogant' was always at hand to be slapped on the French workers she studied as soon as a moment of dysfunctionality manifested itself (as it was when expectations about post-weekend conversations did not coincide). That Australian co-workers were perceived as 'insincere' is always of great surprise to students (Béal, 1992; see also Béal, 1990).

Participants in the workshop at which an early version of this paper was presented expressed the view that the goal of French courses might be that of training students to be 'polite foreigners' in a French context. While we might initially baulk at the word 'politeness,' we must acknowledge that the politeness factor features in the stereotypes through which many cultures view others. Neither should we forget that learning the codes of politeness should not exclude learning and performing impoliteness: the acquisition of the niceties of polite behaviour is not necessarily about being nice – it also has strategic value (cf. Cryle, 1992, p. 134; Freadman, 1994:21; Zarate, 1986, p. 32).

6.2. ... in France

The concerns of the preceding paragraphs are raised by the question of what one might teach students to 'be,' the problem of their identity. Our second, related, set of issues links back to the words 'in France,' that is, to the target culture. We turn then to the question of that culture, how it is figured, and where culture and cultural difference are located.

Our analysis of the generic courses in cross-cultural communication suggests the following concerns for teachers.

- Avoiding a view of cultures as internally undifferentiated entities, splendidly isolated, except for precise moments of cross-cultural communication. This includes the avoidance of models which essentially only teach the recognition of binary oppositions, or suppose that any behaviour by a member of a given culture is necessarily dictated by the core values of that culture and therefore can be extrapolated to all other members.
- Avoiding a deferral of cross-cultural contact.

- Making contact a useful learning experience for students.

In attempting to see how this might play out we offer examples which locate the question in the teaching context with which we are most familiar. Translating these concerns into practical pedagogical questions for teaching French in the Australian university context (that is, a context in which French speaking countries are at some distance, and where there is no expectation that all students will undertake PRA) raises the following issues:

- How can we use cultural diversity within the classroom in a pedagogically relevant way?
- How can we get French culture into the classroom as more than just an object of distanced examination?
- Where might students locate French culture?
- What suggestions can we make about their relationship to it?
- What does it take for contact with French culture to be interesting for our students? Is raw experience sufficient, or do we want them to be critical as well?
- How can we dissuade students from thinking of French culture as a stable category?

6.3. Using cultural diversity in the classroom

'Teaching students to be Australian in France' cannot be our sole directive for the simple reason that, partly in response to increasing internationalization of tertiary education, the population of most classes is unlikely to identify in its entirety as Australian. And even if it does, this is no reason to suppose cultural uniformity. Unit B challenges us to think how we can use the diversity present in the classroom to further our pedagogical ends, rather than merely recognizing and accommodating it in the interests of equity, however important that is. Now, if in Unit B any kind of (national) cultural difference was pertinent to the aims of the course, for a French course the relevant types of cultural difference might seem more limited in the face of the imperative to 'learn French.'

Difference in the classroom can however be of value in relativizing the home cultural values of all class members, thus alerting them to the existence of other ways of doing things. This can, on the one hand, simply break down resistance to certain francophone practices: what seems 'just weird' or 'so like the French' might become that bit more plausible if other members of the class find it absolutely normal. But beyond this, such sensitization also trains students to attend to aspects of situations other than the linguistic. Jordan, 2002, p. 106 describes how ethnographic 'home fieldwork' (akin to the projects of Unit A) may be used to prepare students for ethnographic studies undertaken during PRA, also recommending 'auto-ethnography' which 'reinforces the importance of starting with the self, making strange of one's own practices and learning to articulate them afresh from another, more reflective stance.' This 'making strange' can also take place within the classroom, in lesser projects than full-scale ethnographic studies.

Appendix A presents a worksheet used to this end in a Brisbane first year French class, supplementing textbook-based modules on explanations and invitations. With

the literal mistranslation of the title exemplifying the dangers of direct transposition, the worksheet purports to present extracts from email invitations received by perplexed Francophones whom class members must counsel. Students are encouraged to spell out everything that is implicit in the invitation (the nature of the event; what, if anything guests should provide; dress codes; expectations about replying to the invitation, about bringing a friend, etc.). The presence of students from outside Australia, from outside Brisbane, or simply of students who don't know football codes is invaluable in establishing the list of questions and variables, and in providing unexpected reactions to the explanations elicited. The exercise would be usefully followed up by work on a localized version of the French Interculture Quiz from the Interculture Project, which presents some of the variables in social situations in France.

Cross-cultural encounters of the francophone kind may also present themselves in the classroom, through the presence of Francophone students, teachers or guests (on the last of these, see Cowley and Hanna, 1997). Like those above, such situations demand sensitivity to the individuals concerned and the classroom dynamics but are rich in opportunity. No one person can shoulder the responsibility for incarnating the entirety of one culture, nor should we ignore the fact that cultural practices of immigrant individuals and communities inevitably change. Yet a dynamic model of culture allows us to see this change as typical of all cultures, indicative of change the students will themselves enact, rather than a regrettable dilution of the essence of Frenchness.

6.4. Using cultural difference outside the classroom

Moving beyond the classroom, how can students experience cross-cultural contact in ways useful for their learning in French?

Again, we can turn to Jordan, this time to her suggestion of home fieldwork which trains French students in ethnography prior to PRA. For the teacher of French where most students are not PRA candidates, the question is whether investment in a detailed study not directly related to French will have sufficient payoffs, or be seen to have any by students, who may question the relevance of studies of the local Holden Club or Medieval Jousting Society or Chinese New Year celebrations even if they are written up in French. If in part this reluctance is bound up with the belief that the metalanguage of culture is irrelevant to the learning of a language (as opposed to the study of linguistic metalanguage, readily embraced) there are also valid concerns about the necessity to maximize contact with manifestations of francophone cultures.

We are not of course bereft of Francophone contact. However, the question is not 'How to meet a Francophone,' but how to make that contact, be it with individuals or groups, conducive to learning. There is work to be done to devise ways of making these moments more than mere 'exposure to' the target culture, and to require participation in and reflection on cultural practices. Although this contact is clearly of a different magnitude and type than that presumed by the Interculture Project, many of the resources it provides are adaptable to the Australian situation. In addition, not all cultural practices require a physical presence: many of those that

depend on writing can be participated in as freely from overseas as in the country. Thus learners can send letters to the editor of newspapers (an idea from Hélène Jaccomard); participate in on-line fora (see de Nooy and Hanna, 2003), post film reviews or participate in on-line collaborative writing projects. The time available for consultation of the dictionary and for possible anonymity means that such participation may be experienced by students as comparatively non-threatening. Significantly, such genres also provide stable records of interventions, facilitating analysis and reflection on performance.

We will examine in greater detail our final example of the use of cross cultural difference outside the classroom: it allows us to revisit a favourite project, to draw attention to a burgeoning set of resources and to ponder means of bringing together analytical and performative dimensions of intercultural competence. This is the interview project, an oft-used means of forcing students to activate their communication skills outside the classroom. Again seeking to avoid the oversimplifications of the assumptions sanctioned by Units A and B, with their blindspots regarding mixity, and with the notion of the predictive cultural core, we would want to steer students away from the belief that each interviewee epitomizes the French (or the French Canadian, the Belgian, the Swiss, etc.). Furthermore, setting up the project should – in terms of cross-cultural training – avoid presenting it as 'linguistic practice,' through attention to generic conventions, to politeness strategies, to register, to descriptions of cultural difference, etc. Further to underline the importance of cultural factors, one of us has lately set the topic of cultural difference itself for students' interview projects. Somewhat similarly, Hélène Jaccomard, of the University of Western Australia, supervises interview projects with the prescribed theme of 'assimilation.' Her unit is designed such that the projects are completed before the end of teaching and outcomes may be pooled, allowing useful synthesis and an analytical treatment of student experience. Drawing not only on the experiences of the interviewees, but also on those of immigrants *within* the classroom, students are able to come to some conclusions of wider validity than generalizations extrapolated from their individual projects.

Published accounts of intercultural experiences (such as were used in Unit A) can also be useful in this respect, and here their role would be to add to students' own cross-cultural experiences, rather than substituting for them. Without ignoring questions of generic difference, a confrontation of the accounts with each other, and with the results of the students' work would allow learners to identify recurrent themes in the telling of these stories and to consider how they have shaped the authors' experiences, or been shaped by them, and what constituted and caused recurrent 'culture bumps.' Guide books, travellers' tales (e.g., Pointet, 1999) documentaries (such as Pivot's *Bouillon de Culture* on Australia), journalistic pieces on the release of Australian films, novels, etc. (Cain, 2001, Chap 6 and McGregor, 2002 provide a wealth of examples) can be exploited to explore the commonplaces which will be used by others to construct students' identities for them. The ever-growing body of biographical stories of Life in France ('in the tradition of *A Year in Provence*' as the jackets say) includes recent accounts identified as Franco-Australian: in addition to Sarah Turnbull's immensely popular *Almost French* are

Just Enough French by Sally Hammond, and, in similar vein, Stephanie Alexander's *Cooking and Travelling in South-West France*. The fictionalized biography *Au Pair* (McGregor, 1993) could also be studied. Although ideally teachers would be able to point to a wide range of cross-cultural combinations, in line with the composition of their classes, Australian-French encounters have proved interesting to recently arrived international students for whom the discussion of what it is to be Australian can be instructive.

7. Conclusion

In language teaching, the principle of the communicative method carries the day and language classrooms are full of attempts at meaningful language use. Yet while immersion in the target language is a common occurrence, often interactive cross-cultural participation is deferred, and the target culture remains a paradise perpetually postponed. Our interrogation of the two courses in intercultural communication leads us to ponder, in effect, what a cross-cultural communicative method can be, when not taught in-country.

Class evaluations of Unit B repeatedly praise advances in tolerance and understanding and we have no doubt that students in both business units were transformed by them. However, we have to ask if moral transformation necessarily engenders adequate performance: we remind readers that these courses tested analytical ability and displays of knowledge relevant to cross-cultural understanding, rather than cross-cultural performance itself. Thus in class discussion the components of such performance, including, of course, language, were afforded little attention. In a 'language' class, where the target cultures are more definable than in generic courses, we have no excuse for not dealing with performance. We have suggested ways of exploiting available forms of cultural difference, both within and without the classroom in order to train students to see themselves as foreigners who can communicate successfully with others.

The value given to performance should not exclude theoretical knowledge, and indeed, given the limitations on the kinds of differences to which students can be exposed in the university context, such knowledge would seem critical in providing learners with the conceptual framework necessary to deal with future encounters with forms of cultural difference. This knowledge is however often missing from language courses. This urges us to acquire the appropriate meta-language to make explicit cultural information, at the same time as we examine the implicit models upon which our teaching practices rely.

If language teachers find it more than odd that cross-cultural communication could be taught without reference to language, cross-cultural communication specialists find it equally unreasonable that one might claim to teach culturally appropriate communicative skills in the complete absence of any gesture towards cross-cultural theory. But how can one choose between the linguistically competent but culturally inappropriate person and s/he who, sensitive to cultural difference, correctly interprets interlocutors' behaviour but, in the absence of a common

language, is completely unable to dialogue with them? The choice is disastrous. To avoid it, we suggest that if there are two cultures which should communicate, rejecting notions of their separation from each other, they are those of the teachers of language and of cross-cultural communication. Such dialogue threatens the validity of neither, respects the specific priorities of each and affirms that communication between cultures can indeed produce positive transformation.

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Appendix A. HHB063 French 3 2003 La bière peu bavarde

Personnage A: Vous êtes Francophone et vous venez d'arriver à Brisbane pour y passer quelque temps afin d'apprendre la langue et la culture. Vous avez reçu un courriel qui vous laisse un peu perplexe. Vous demandez des conseils à un(e) ami(e) australien(ne) pour comprendre ce que l'on attend de vous dans cette situation.

Personnage B: Vous êtes Australien(ne) et vous avez un(e) ami(e) francophone récemment arrivé(e) à Brisbane pour apprendre la langue et la culture. Cette personne vient de recevoir un courriel qu'elle ne comprend pas très bien. Pouvez-vous lui faire une explication, avec tous les détails nécessaires ?

Vous pouvez choisir l'extrait du message mystérieux de la liste suivante: [4]

What about you come round Friday night for a quiet beer?

We're having a bit of a barbie on Saturday afternoon and would love to see you there. There's a pool.

You must drop over sometime.

[4] [The Quiet Beer. Person A: You are a native speaker of French who has recently arrived in Brisbane with the intention of staying there for a while to learn the language and the culture. You have received an email which puzzles you. You ask an Australian friend for advice about what is expected of you in the situation described. Person B: You're Australian and you have a French-speaking friend who has recently arrived in Brisbane to learn the language and culture. This friend has received an email which s/he doesn't entirely understand. Can you provide an explanation, with all the necessary details? You can choose the extract from the mysterious message from the following list:]

Everyone is welcome to my housewarming on Saturday night. Please bring a plate.

Do you want to come to the football with us on Wednesday night?

We're all going to an Italian place in the Valley: would you like to come?

There's a party at my place on Saturday night, if you're interested.

Simon is celebrating his 21st on the 31st with a party at his parents' place and you're invited.

My Mum and Dad wondered if you'd like to spend Christmas day with the fam. Grandparents included!

The Office End-of-year Party is on next Friday afternoon in the lunchroom. Don't forget your Secret Santa gift ($10 limit).

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