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## DISMANTLING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE – A PROPOSAL FOR INTERPRETING THE CONCEPT OF CRITICAL CULTURAL AWARENESS IN AN L2 TEACHING CONTEXT

### Abstract

The marginal role of intercultural competences in L2 teaching in the Polish context has recently been observed (e.g., Sobkowiak, 2015, Róg, 2016). Too general and often confusing definitions of the fundamental concepts underlying intercultural competence might be one of the reasons why L2 teachers reluctantly approach the idea of implementing the intercultural component into their teaching repertoires. The paper aims at discussing the importance of raising students' critical cultural awareness, a central component of Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence, interpreting and extending its definition using 16 indicators organised into five categories: cultural identity, decentring, reflectiveness and meta-awareness, cultural understanding, and attitudes. The paper ends with three examples of reflective tasks, based on the indicators presented, which can be easily incorporated into L2 teachers' lesson plans.

**Keywords:** intercultural competence, critical cultural awareness, critical reflection, reflective tasks

**Słowa kluczowe:** kompetencja interkulturowa, krytyczna świadomość kulturowa, krytyczna refleksja, zadania pobudzające refleksję

## **1. Introduction**

One of the reasons why intercultural competence is still being marginalised in L2 teaching practice, also in the Polish educational context (see Sobkowiak, 2015; Róg, 2016), might be not specific enough and often confusing terminology used in conceptualisations of intercultural competence. Deardorff (2006: 253), in an attempt to arrive at a unified definition of intercultural competence, observes that the majority of the analysed definitions are too general. By the same token, Fuentes (2016) presents the results of his analysis of the documents published by the Council of Europe and concludes by saying the policy and recommendations are written in general terms, leaving L2 teachers with the challenge of interpreting and later implementing those ideas in practice. The problem is intensified by the fact that the majority of the concepts and models had to be translated into languages other than English; with some of the terms still waiting for their equivalents.

It seems relevant to stress the importance of sharing well-defined and clearly explained concepts and their impact on the process of introducing and developing intercultural competence in an L2 classroom. Such clearly defined and specific definitions could later be translated into straightforward teaching objectives, which might encourage L2 teachers to include elements of intercultural competence in the process of designing their L2 syllabi.

The aim of the paper is to present an extended definition of critical cultural awareness, one of the key components of Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence, together with a list of indicators that could be translated into particular teaching objectives. First, the importance and centrality of critical cultural awareness will be discussed along with the challenges of implementing it in practice. Next, the definition of critical cultural awareness will be introduced, explained and extended by distinguishing five categories comprising 16 specific indicators. Finally, three reflective tasks oriented towards raising L2 students' critical cultural awareness will be presented and discussed.

## **2. The importance of critical cultural awareness in developing intercultural competence and the challenges of putting it into practice**

Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence seems to be the one that serves as a foundation for numerous documents brought out by the Council of Europe (e.g., Byram et al., 2002; Council of Europe, 2001; Council of Europe, 2007; Council of Europe, 2009). It has substantially influenced foreign language education policies across Europe, because it has been considered one of the eight key competences defined by the EU which are recognized as

vital in students' successful personal, social and professional development. The model builds on the concept of communicative competence and supplements it with intercultural competence, which is postulated to embrace five interrelated components, i.e. knowledge of products, behaviours, events and social processes (*savoirs*), skills of reflecting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), attitudes of openness and curiosity (*savoir être*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*), which requires deeper, critical reflection on one's own as well as other culture.

As Shaules (2007: 1) observantly states in the introduction to his book *Deep Culture*, "the intercultural contact we have in our 'global village' doesn't amount to us having 'intercultural experiences'". Therefore, it seems necessary to stress the importance of developing students' language and cultural awareness in order to make the intercultural encounters more meaningful. Although critical cultural awareness (CCA) is usually listed as the last component of intercultural competence and is sometimes even overlooked in some interpretations of the model (Nugent & Catalano, 2015: 16), Byram (2012a: 7) accentuates its centrality, as CCA adds quality and essence to the remaining elements of intercultural competence. It is because of such underlying abilities as engagement, reflexivity, relativity and problematisation that CCA allows a learner to obtain a deeper insight into cultural values of other cultures and makes it possible to venture a critique of one's own cultural habits and values (Byram & Masuhara, 2013: 147). While L2 learning and teaching is far from being ideologically and politically neutral, CCA seems to also concentrate on an ability to critically reflect on the process in order to better understand the context and the conditions under which a new language is taught and learnt.

The message of CCA resonates with other concepts that also deal with the issue of reflection and deeper cultural understanding, which has to do with the ability to perceive cultural incidents from a more objective and unbiased perspective. Thanks to the *third place*, one can perceive himself/herself 'both from the inside and from the outside' (Kramsch, 2013: 62). Since developing critical cultural awareness requires such elements as critical reflection, explicit criteria for evaluation of cultural values, and the ability to decentre and adopt a more distant perspective, CCA might serve as a great tool for recognizing, evaluating and mediating between the myriad of identities, perspectives and meanings that interact 'in-between', i.e. in the third place.

It may also be stated that CCA is deeply embedded within the framework of Critical Pedagogy (CP), as they share in common such values as engagement, agency and empowerment. CCA as an approach to the process of learning in general strives for educating aware, critical and autonomous learners, who by adopting a critical perspective are able to make more informed

decisions and can fully participate in the common good. By equipping students with a set of abilities that require critical reflection, decentring and questioning what is often taken for granted, L2 teachers can maintain an atmosphere of intellectual liberation which could lead to students' true empowerment, which closely corresponds with what Freire (1970: 47) calls a "quest for human completion". Since in CP school is viewed as a highly political space with room for democratic acts (Giroux, 1993), students' empowerment and engagement in the process are crucial in becoming an aware democratic citizen.

The political dimension of CCA is an important voice in the debate on education for citizenship (e.g., Guilherme, 2002; Byram, 2008), later also called intercultural citizenship (e.g., Byram, 2012b; Byram, 2013), which aims at promoting democratic citizenship through critical understanding of society and its values, willingness to go beyond national boundaries and take action in order to become a member of the transnational community. According to Starkey (2002: 29), CCA is a vital component of democratic citizenship, as it not only enables a better understanding of the world in general, but it also addresses such issues as injustice, social exclusion or discrimination. This new development in intercultural education is referred to by Dasli (2011: 27) as the *critical intercultural language pedagogy 'moment'*. More recently, some elements of CCA are echoed in the *Reference framework of competences for democratic culture* (Council of Europe 2018), where the emphasis is placed on reflection and critical awareness.

As the idea of CCA was put forward more than 20 years ago, it is important to acknowledge its importance and relevance in the transmodern reality, described as dynamic, unstable, complex, unpredictable and interconnected (see e.g., Kramsch, 2014; Canagarajah, 2018; Pennycook, 2018). There is an apparent shift in the way culture is understood and defined, moving from the national to transnational paradigm (Risager, 2007), and adopting a non-essentialist approach to culture (Baker, 2012). Diane Larsen-Freeman (2018) envisions the future of SLA research by pointing to the emergence of an ecological perspective on language. In this holistic approach, where elements of complex systems are interconnected and interrelated, the ability to mediate between a number of identities, perspectives, and modalities is of paramount importance, particularly in the era of social media (Godwin-Jones, 2018). By raising students' critical cultural awareness, learners can be equipped with the skills needed in the 21st-century classroom.

It might be, therefore, assumed that CCA lays a foundation for a successful and meaningful implementation of intercultural competence in L2 instruction, as according to Byram (2012a: 9), without critical cultural awareness, "language teaching does not contribute to its full potential to education or *Bildung*, and it is the notion of criticality which makes the difference".

However, as the results of the research conducted by Young and Sachdev (2011) reveal, interviewed L2 teachers consider CCA an obstacle to developing intercultural competence, justifying their opinions by pointing out that CCA involves discussing controversial topics, which hinders comfortable and calm atmosphere in the classroom. This rather reluctant attitude toward the idea of including CCA in L2 syllabi might be explained by the lack of specific elaboration on what it really stands for and what the process of developing CCA should look like in practice.

A similar problem, though referring more globally to intercultural competence, has also been recognised in the Polish educational context. Even though the premises of intercultural education are present in the Polish core curriculum for English as a foreign language as a subject, manifested in fostering students' attitudes of curiosity, tolerance, intercultural sensitivity, and openness to other cultures, Róg (2016) observes in his extensive overview of the research into intercultural competence conducted in the Polish context that intercultural competence has a marginal role in the L2 classroom in Poland. L2 teachers admit they do not include intercultural tasks because they lack intercultural training and experience, despite the fact that there are many didactic materials designed for implementing IC in the classroom (Róg, 2016: 146). Similar conclusions can be drawn from Sobkowiak's (2015) research study investigating how Polish L2 learners and teachers understand, view and experience the intercultural component in the L2 classroom. Sobkowiak (2015: 222) finds an explanation for the marginal role of intercultural competence in the Polish context in L2 teachers' limited understanding of the complexity of intercultural education.

The problems identified by Sobkowiak (2015) and Róg (2016) indicate a need for a more detailed and teacher-oriented conceptualisation of critical cultural awareness, which could be easily translated into particular teaching objectives. This will be the focus of the following section.

### **3. Towards becoming an autonomous intercultural mediator: an extended definition of critical cultural awareness.**

Having discussed the importance and centrality of critical cultural awareness in the process of developing learners' intercultural competence and the challenges of implementing it in practical terms, it seems relevant to discuss what lies behind the concept in more detail. Byram (1997: 101) defines critical cultural awareness as "an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries". The definition is followed by three major objectives that the author includes in his description of the term, namely:

- a) identifying and interpreting cultural perspectives, practices and products;
- b) making an evaluative analysis of intercultural incidents and documents;
- c) interacting and mediating between cultures, by incorporating knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to negotiate meaning with the interlocutor.

By approaching the definition from an L2 teacher's perspective, both the definition and the listed objectives seem to be open to interpretation and need to be further developed in order to translate them into specific criteria used to design syllabi, didactic materials, assessment tools, and lesson plans.

One of the main aims of the present paper is to propose my interpretation of this particular component of intercultural competence, which is crucial in raising students' cultural sensitivity and fostering their critical reflection. What seems fundamental for proper interpreting of the concept of critical cultural awareness is understanding the key phrases used in Byram's definition, i.e. *critical evaluation, explicit criteria, one's own vs the other culture*. Byram himself (1997: 101) underscores the importance of identifying and understanding one's own cultural perspective in order to engage in meaningful intercultural exchanges. The questions that any L2 teacher would like to know the answers to are: What skills are involved in the ability to evaluate critically one's own and other cultures? How would I know that critical cultural awareness is developed in my classes? What are the particular abilities that an L2 learner should possess in order to exhibit elements of critical cultural awareness?

In an effort to answer these questions, a list of indicators of critical cultural awareness was designed to describe a competent and CCA-oriented L2 learner. The three aforementioned general and overarching objectives put forward by Byram (1997) served as a springboard for examining the concept in more detail. First, literature devoted to raising learners' CCA was analysed. Although there is a great number of materials and resources aiming at developing intercultural competence in general, I have focused on analysing those tasks which directly target raising students' CCA (Fleming, 1998; Müller-Hartman, 2000; Tarasheva & Davcheva, 2001; Houghton, 2008; Cooper, He & Levin, 2011; Nugent & Catalano, 2015). Second, a list of features used to describe a CCA-oriented L2 learner was compiled and organised into thematic groups of descriptors. Finally, the descriptors were translated into 16 indicators which were later divided into five distinctive categories, namely: a) cultural identity, b) decentring, c) reflectiveness and meta-awareness, d) cultural understanding, and e) attitudes. It seems important to point out that all of the indicators, though organised into categories, are interrelated and intertwined. The complete list of categories of critical cultural awareness and its indicators is presented in Table 1 below.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A preliminary list of indicators served as a tool in designing a questionnaire that was part of a research study design described in Cierpisz (in press).

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	CATEGORY	INDICATOR
A.	CULTURAL IDENTITY	a. being able to identify one's system of values
		b. understanding the importance of one's cultural heritage
		c. having a complex and deterritorialised understanding of cultural identity
B.	DECENTRING	a. being able to challenge stereotyped and ethnocentric patterns
		b. being able to question one's own judgement
		c. being able to recognise and accept cultural difference
C.	REFLECTIVENESS and META-AWARENESS	a. being able to analyse a culture-specific situation from different perspectives
		b. being able to adopt a distanced perspective in analysing culture-specific situations
		c. being able to operate on explicit shared concepts, e.g. ethnocentrism, stereotyping, value system, etc.
		d. being able to adopt an ethnorelative perspective
D.	CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING	a. understanding the broad and complex notion of culture and intercultural relations
		b. understanding cultural diversity as a natural condition
		c. understanding and respecting one's right to having a different opinion from others
E.	ATTITUDES	a. feeling a sense of equality and respect
		b. exhibiting curiosity of the unknown
		c. willing to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds

Table 1: Categories and indicators of critical cultural awareness.

The first category accentuates the importance of identifying one's cultural identity and systems of values, and the need for introspection in order to become an aware and competent intercultural mediator. This group of indicators refers to this fragment of Byram's definition, where the significance of knowing one's own culture and country is emphasised. It means that the student is able to identify his/her system of values and understands the importance of respecting and appreciating their cultural heritage and understands the complex nature of cultural identity, which becomes more and more often deterritorialised.

Since one of the primary goals of intercultural education is to move towards ethnorelativism (Bennett, 1993; Shaules, 2006), the second category represents the decentring skills which focus, in particular, on abilities to challenge stereotyped and ethnocentric attitudes and habits. Competent intercultural learners should also be equipped with an ability to question their own judgement and what is often taken for granted. Only then could they become able to recognise and accept cultural differences, which is the next step towards the ethnorelative stages of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 2004).

Another group of abilities, which characterise an autonomous and responsible intercultural learner, revolves around one of the crucial aspects of critical cultural awareness, namely being able to critically reflect on the events, systems of beliefs, or the “frames of reference” (Mezirow, 1997: 5), and being able to adopt a distanced and objective perspective in analysing those incidents. These abilities are manifested in situations where the learner needs to adopt a different perspective, often being in opposition to his/her own, in analysing a situation, or when the learner is required to adopt a more objective perspective to see a communication problem from, what Kramersch (1993: 239) calls, the third place. By adopting different or distanced perspectives, students are empowered to relativise the cultural norms and see the situation through the eyes of *the other*. This meta-awareness of the intercultural communicative situations is also reflected in learners’ ability to operate on explicit and shared concepts, such as ethnocentrism, stereotyping, heritage, to name only a few, which is crucial for understanding the complex intercultural relations. The emphasis put on explicit criteria was one of the fundamental elements comprised in the definition of critical cultural awareness.

Cultural understanding is another category within critical cultural awareness. There are three assumptions that a learner needs to make in order to exhibit a critical and reflective approach to intercultural exchanges. Firstly, learners should understand the complexity of the notion of culture, often raised in the theoretical considerations about the nature of culture in general, and intercultural competence in particular, also in the Polish educational context (e.g., Komorowska, 2006; Czajkowska-Prokop, 2010; Iwaniuk, 2014; Mihułka, 2016). Secondly, learners should perceive and understand cultural diversity as a natural condition, a postulate strongly emphasised by Bennett (1993, 2004). Thirdly, critical cultural awareness requires the understanding of and respect for one’s right to having a different opinion from others. This sense of mutual respect between interlocutors is echoed in the final group of indicators.

The final category, though addressed by Byram as a separate component of the model, embraces the affective aspect of raising students’ critical cultural awareness, i.e. the attitudes towards the others. It seems to be the starting point for any intercultural exchange, very often before the interlocutors meet. This category includes, first of all, a sense of equality and respect for all the people, including the representatives of more distant and foreign cultures. The learners should also exhibit curiosity of the unknown, which results in their willingness to interact with others in the potential intercultural exchanges. It was argued by Byram (1997: 33) that an adequate attitude towards cultural difference is crucial to developing intercultural competence.

Since the process of raising students' CCA is a dynamic and emergent phenomenon, by no means should the list of indicators be considered as finite. It should be assumed that in the course of developing CCA in practice, new indicators could emerge. The present list of indicators is a starting point for L2 teachers to adopt the critical perspective in the process of designing and tailoring their teaching repertoire.

It is important to note at this point that the indicators do not inform the teacher or the learner on what to do, or what to think or feel, but rather address the question of how to approach and mediate between different cultures. By promoting reflection, critical thinking skills, questioning the obvious, respecting difference and remaining open and curious, the process of raising students' critical cultural awareness contributes to their development and empowerment as autonomous and transformative intellectuals (Kumaravadivelu, 2012: 9).

#### 4. Reflective tasks: developing critical cultural awareness in practice

One of the major reasons for extending and elaborating on the concept of critical cultural awareness has been to make it easier for teachers to translate the indicators into particular teaching objectives. The aim of this section is twofold: firstly, to present three different reflective tasks that could be easily incorporated into an EFL course; and secondly, to discuss and reflect on the implementation of those tasks in my own teaching context. The presented tasks focus primarily on developing particular aspects of critical cultural awareness, such as cultural identity, reflectiveness and meta-awareness, and attitudes (for a list of teaching objectives and corresponding indicators of CCA see Table 2 below). As one of the premises of intercultural education is to integrate the intercultural component with the linguistic and communicative objectives, the tasks aim at improving students' speaking skills and may serve as a trigger for further discussions.

Name of the task	Teaching objectives	Indicators of CCA
"Revisiting childhood"	to trigger discussion on students' value systems and how this system was shaped over years; to encourage students to reflect retrospectively on their childhood and the values present in the books they read as children;	a. being able to identify one's system of values  b. understanding the importance of one's cultural heritage
"Reversed ethnocentrism"	to encourage students to adopt the perspective of "the other";	a. being able to analyse a situation from different perspectives

	to challenge students' ethnocentric attitudes;  to introduce the concept of ethnocentrism and its impact on intercultural relations; to address the issue of cultural diversity	b. being able to challenge stereotyped and ethnocentric patterns  c. being able to operate on explicit shared concepts
"Music of the world"	to draw students' attention and engage students in the lesson to trigger discussion on cultural diversity and difference to present Tuaregs and elements of their culture	a. exhibiting curiosity of the unknown  b. understanding cultural diversity as a natural condition

Table 2: Reflective tasks, the teaching objectives and the corresponding indicators of CCA.

#### 4.1. Reflective task "Revisiting childhood"

"Revisiting childhood" is a task which is designed to raise students' awareness of their own cultural identity by exploring cultural values and discussing the importance of cultural heritage, in particular the significance of children's literature in shaping cultural identity. The aim of the task is to draw students' attention to cultural values represented in fairy tales and books for children.

The task begins with a short warm-up session with questions about the students' experience with reading books as children, and the importance of reading books to children in general. Next, the questions revolve around their favourite books and fairy tales, focusing on the message conveyed by means of the stories. Then, students are asked to work in groups on a given English children's book<sup>2</sup>. Each group discusses the content of the book by focusing on the language, the message or moral, as well as values hidden in the story. When the students are ready with their analysis, there is an open discussion on the following issues: what can children learn from such books? Is there anything that surprised the students or caught their attention? How does the story affect the reader? Which values are promoted in the book? At the very end, the students are asked to reflect on the stories told or read by their parents once again, but this time focusing on what they learnt from these stories and tales.

The task is often well-received by the participants, most probably due to the engaging stories brought to the classroom. If the task is planned for the whole lesson, the students can be asked to read the stories to the rest of the class. This has proved to be a golden opportunity to discuss the role of storytelling in cherishing cultural heritage.

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<sup>2</sup> The books that I usually bring to my classes are *The Giving Tree*, *Edward the Emu* and *Little Beauty*.

## 4.2. Reflective task “Reversed ethnocentrism”

The second task, “Reversed ethnocentrism”, deals explicitly with the issue of ethnocentrism, by informing and raising students’ meta-awareness, by challenging their stereotyped and ethnocentric attitudes towards cultural differences.

First, students are presented with a portrait of a member of a tribe from Papua New Guinea, with a typical hairstyle, wearing traditional ornaments, photographed in the jungle. The students are asked to write their first impression of the man on a separate piece of paper. The teacher collects their answers and writes them on the blackboard, by marking how frequently a given impression appeared. Second, the students have to guess the country of origin of the man in the picture. When they learn he comes from Papua New Guinea, they are asked to point the country on the map. The students are also asked to brainstorm any associations they have with this part of the world. Next, students’ most common impressions are presented and discussed. Since very often students’ impressions are expressed by using evaluative language, such as *weird*, *strange*, *scary*, etc., there is an opportunity to introduce and discuss the concept of ethnocentrism to the students. Once the students understand the idea behind and the mechanism of ethnocentric thinking patterns, they are asked to discuss the reversed situation where a tourist from Papua New Guinea visits Poland and sees Poles for the first time – what would he/she consider strange, weird or dangerous? As soon as students are ready with their ideas, students discuss the impact of ethnocentrism on people’s behaviour together with the possible long-term consequences of ethnocentric behaviour.

By adopting the perspective of the other and reversing the situation, the students are given a chance to change their point of reference to see that what people consider strange and abnormal is heavily influenced by their sense of cultural belonging. The example of Papua New Guinea, a culturally diverse and plurilingual region, creates an opportunity for the students to learn more about this part of the world and encourages them to question their often stereotyped thinking, which is exhibited by describing such people as the man in the picture as “less civilised” or “savage”. Having in mind Smith’s (2011) warning against dehumanisation and its tight connection with ethnocentrism, it seems even more relevant to have such discussions with students, particularly in a language classroom.

## 4.3. Reflective task “Music of the world”

The aim of the third reflective task called “Music of the world” is to promote positive attitudes towards cultural diversity by awakening students’ curiosity

by means of music. The task begins with playing a song performed by a Tuareg music band<sup>3</sup>. The students are asked to listen to the song and think about the lyrics – what might the band be singing about? What feelings does the song evoke? Which part of the world does the song come from? Students' impressions and ideas are collected and the song is played again, this time with the clip and English subtitles. Students learn about a small part of Tuareg culture, a celebration of preparing tea, and the teacher present some basic information about Tuaregs, their language and nomadic lifestyle. Students are asked whether they would like to visit and talk to a Tuareg. Finally, the teacher asks a couple of reflective questions: Have you heard such music on the mainstream radio? Do you think such music could be popular in your country/region? Would you listen to it?

Incorporating music into an L2 classroom to trigger discussion on any topic is a very engaging and effective technique. It may also serve as a springboard for raising students' cultural sensitivity, but also for broadening their intercultural knowledge of a given cultural community.

All of the tasks discussed above were part of a research study that aimed at investigating the process of raising EFL university students' critical cultural awareness which incorporated the following tools: a questionnaire, reflective tasks, reflective student journals, students' course evaluation form, and semi-structured interviews with the students. (for more details on the research study design see Cierpisz, in press). I would rely on the collected data and my own experience with performing the tasks in an EFL classroom in the section below.

#### **4.4. Discussion**

The tasks were performed as part of an advanced EFL speaking course offered to eight different groups of English philology students (BA cycle); the total number of students who enrolled for the course amounted to 148. All of the students exhibited an advanced level of English (around C1). The course comprised 15 meetings spanning one academic semester. The reflective tasks were an integral part of the course, which often served as a trigger for further discussion on the topic. Each of the tasks was followed by an entry in students' individual reflective journal accessed via an e-learning platform.

The task called "Revisiting childhood" was very positively received by the students – most of them enjoyed reading the books for children and put some effort in getting into character while reading them to the rest of the group. Generally speaking, in the majority of cases the students focused on identifying the values, some of them even analysing the fairy tales more critically by

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<sup>3</sup> The song I play in class is "Iswegh Attay" by Tinariwen.

pinpointing some aspects of the fairy tales which reinforce stereotypes often by depicting women as vulnerable, passive, and dependent on men. The biggest challenge that had to be overcome while working on this task was when students' parents did not read them books when they were younger, so they could not refer to their own experience of listening to fairy tales – that situation required a slight modification of the topic, and instead of focusing on identifying values, the students were discussing the importance and the impact of reading books to children. Out of these three discussed tasks, "Revisiting childhood" would require more time – it is important to give students time to read the books, analyse them, discuss their content and later reflect deeper on the questions.

The second task, "Reversed ethnocentrism", was ranked by the students as one of the most informative tasks, as it was revealed in the data collected by means of students' course evaluation forms. Indeed, this task requires the teacher to explain the concept of ethnocentrism in form of a mini-lecture and to properly moderate the discussion. One of its shortcomings is the fact that the teacher has to rely on students' first impressions and paradoxically "hope" that the students will exhibit ethnocentric attitudes in the introduction to the task, only to later analyse the collected material and discuss the impact of ethnocentric attitudes. What was observed in all of the groups where the task was performed was that the students understood ethnocentrism as a threat or offence – a behaviour that should be eliminated. Only a few students considered ethnocentrism to be a natural phenomenon. The biggest challenge of the task is to make sure that the students do not feel ashamed of their first impressions so as to avoid their defensive attitude and to dispel the feeling of being unfairly criticised. The important take-away from this task is for students to understand how pervasive ethnocentric attitudes are, and how powerful the impact of stereotypes and prejudice is – these observations should be accentuated in the debriefing segment at the end of the task.

From the students' perspective, "Music of the world" is a task that is very engaging and stimulating. Students' reaction to the song is often very positive and they enjoy guessing the theme of the lyrics – for most of the learners the melody of the language is completely different from what they are used to hearing on a daily basis. The task is effective in triggering students' interest in and arousing their curiosity of the Tuareg language, culture and values. Students' attitude is illustrated by what one of the students shared in her reflective journal after the task. She wrote:

I read about Tuaregs' culture and I am surprised (positively) by the fact that Tuareg women have such respect and power in their communities. That's amazing especially that they are of the Muslim belief. Moreover, I found out

that my favourite necklace is connected to the culture of Tuareg women - it is khomessa which they wear to keep themselves away from evil spirits. I'm quite ashamed that I didn't know about existence of Tuaregs before...They seem to be extraordinary people.

The biggest challenge in performing and debriefing the task is what Starkey (2007: 58) calls exoticising other cultures. Without any deeper reflection on Tuaregs as a cultural group, the task may contribute to reducing this group of people and their culture to simplified examples of their products and practices, which could consequently lead to stereotyping and trivialising cultural differences. It is, therefore, important to carefully moderate the discussion so that the students are eager to learn more about the band, their music, traditions and history.

## 5. Conclusions

The proposed extended interpretation of critical cultural awareness, a prerequisite for a successful development of intercultural competences and a key to meaningful intercultural exchange, resulted in an emergence of five distinctive categories, such as cultural identity, decentring, reflectiveness and meta-awareness, cultural understanding, and attitudes. Each category is represented by 3-4 indicators, reflecting a particular ability that an autonomous 21st-century L2 learner should possess. The interpretation of CCA fosters such abilities as challenging ethnocentric patterns, questioning one's own judgement, or adopting a distanced perspective. The three ready-made reflective tasks, i.e. "Revisiting childhood", "Reversed ethnocentrism", and "Music of the world", based on the identified and discussed indicators, aim at triggering students' critical reflection – a central point of meaningful intercultural education, and might serve as a useful and practical tool in achieving the teaching objectives reflecting the presented indicators of critical cultural awareness.

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