Tracing intercultural and interlinguistic moves within and beyond student mobility programmes: The case of the IEREST project[1]

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Abstract

The paper presents the core aims and objectives of the teaching materials developed within the IEREST (Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers) project, and shows how the innovative approach adopted for these activities can be implemented in the classroom.

The IEREST teaching modules are innovative in that the approach adopted draws strongly on the notions of *critical cosmopolitanism* (Holliday 2012) and *intercultural communicative competence* (Byram 1997 and 2012). The activities in the modules promote a view of culture as a negotiated „process" among individuals, small or large groups and intercultural communication as a co-construction of meaning conveyed across linguistic and cultural boundaries, thus rejecting explicitly any "essentialist" attitudes and simplistic overgeneralisation of "otherness." The approach to language use in intercultural encounters observes how the above concepts are expressed in a number of contexts, while also building on the view that intercultural communication among bilinguals often takes advantage of a *lingua franca*, a foreign language that all the participants in the communicative activity have in common because they had learned it. Taking into account the concept of "linguaculture" (Risager 2012) the modules seek to raise awareness of the negotiating process in rendering meaning through a linguistic and cultural blend of both the target language and the speake's first language.

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[1] www.ierest-project.eu. To access the complete set of IEREST resources see also http://www.ierestproject.eu/humbox.html or http://humbox.ac.uk/group/19.

> The paradigm shift proposed by the IEREST Modules indicates a need to rethink current practices in intercultural education and to acknowledge societal changes in multilingual Europe and beyond.

1. Introduction

One of the main benefits of student mobility within the Erasmus programme is often quoted to be gaining greater (inter)cultural awareness, which in turn leads to enhanced intercultural communicative competence (Byram 2012; Chen & Starosta 1998-99; Deardorff 2004; Fantini 2000/1), an important skill, which increases and strengthens Erasmus students" employability in a globalized world. By acquiring (inter)cultural awareness students expand and deepen their understanding as to how cultural values and conventions affect our attitudes and behaviour (Byram 1997; Chen & Starosta 1998-99), a competence that helps them to develop empathy and mediate more effectively between cultures and languages in intercultural encounters.

Similar views are expressed in the Green Paper on Learning Mobility, which makes the claim that "learning mobility adds to human capital, as students access new knowledge and develop new linguistic skills and intercultural competences" (Commission of the European Communities, 2009/329, p. 2). However, studies by a number of researchers (Dervin 2009; Holmes & O"Neill, 2012) point out that development of (inter)cultural awareness is not naturally acquired through exposure to intercultural contacts in an international environment, nor does residence in a foreign country of itself produce positive representations of that country (Anquetil, 2006; Byram & Zarate, 1995; Dervin 2008). What is more, such an exposure to (inter)cultural contacts does not in itself abate students' stereotypical perceptions of "otherness," but can sometimes even enhance prejudice (Starkey & Osler 2009; Starosta 2014). These findings led us to the conclusion that students should be guided to gain applicable insights into salient issues of intercultural communicative competence, in order to derive benefit from their study period abroad.

Whereas there is no doubt that a period of time spent abroad within the Erasmus sojourn scheme is extremely beneficial for students of foreign languages, the complete immersion into the foreign language and the exposure to communication in a foreign language in a number of new communicative situations can be quite challenging. Ideally, students spend the exchange period in the country where the language of their studies is the official language, spoken

by the majority of the population. Quite often, however, students find mobility opportunities only in a country where other languages are commonly used, while English is mostly used as a "lingua franca" in academic and social environments. In both such cases students gain confidence in using a foreign language, acquire greater fluency in expressing their own meaning, but they also frequently report various stages of frustration in the communication process. To help students cope better with the difficulties of actual language usage in intercultural situations, it was felt that they needed to develop a deeper awareness of processes governing the wording of our thoughts in communication and how these processes are linked to the cultural backgrounds of the participants in a conversation. Building on the concepts of linguaculture and the transnational paradigm (Risager, 2008) we propose that students can be led to consider aspects of linguistic and cultural complexity present in an international experience as part of preparation for the Erasmus mobility.

The present paper illustrates how the above listed insights and considerations are integrated in some segments of the materials produced within the IEREST (Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers) project. Namely, this European project proposes to help students explore intercultural issues and integrate new communication paradigms during their study or work sojourn abroad by following various "intercultural paths" developed within the IEREST Modules. In particular, we will describe here the approaches used to dealing with the topic of racism and ethnocentrism within the pre-departure module activity entitled *Anti-discrimination study circle* (See also Appendix A). The activity illustrated here follows the general framework suggested by the IEREST approach; however, some tasks were slightly adapted to the specific needs of an international group of advanced learners of foreign languages, majoring in English. The paper discusses also the results of a small-scale action research carried out by students within the activity, as well as the feedback reported in their journals and during the focus-group discussion. In the end, implications and recommendations of the pilot course of the IEREST project are considered.

2. The IEREST educational resources

In its introduction, the manual published as the outcome of the IEREST project clearly states the underlying principles guiding the compilation of the IEREST resources. First, both study abroad and intercultural education literature state that immersion in a different environment does not in itself reduce stereotypical perceptions of "otherness" (Shaules, 2007; Strong, 2011); in addition to experience, interculturality needs reflection and analysis (Alred, Byram, & Fleming, 2002; Jackson, 2010; Vande Berg, 2009). This analysis and reflection should take

students to understand why we create divisions, how they are expressed in language and how unreflective use of language can even deepen such divisions by hurting people's feelings, as well as the fact that we use such language without considering the effect it can provoke (Beaven, et al, 2015, p. 9)

Clearly, the IEREST resources search for a new paradigm to enhance students" intercultural competence by focusing on a critical assessment of the linguistic means available in language. The materials devise a fresh approach by which to guide students to deal with intercultural matters that they may face during their mobility period. As a consequence, a need to redefine the concept of intercultural competence and the concept of intercultural communicative competence emerges. The rethinking of these key concepts draws on authors and researchers who have recently discussed the elusive problem of defining intercultural competence (Byram, 2012; Deardoff, 2009; Dervin, 2009; Rathje, 2007; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009) and pointed out the polysemic nature of the term "intercultural," which is often used interchangeably with a number of variants derived from "culture," such as "cross-cultural," "transcultural, „intercultural," all used as labels for the same meaning (Beaven, Comas-Quinn, & Sawhill, 2013). Furthermore, Byram (2012), Holliday (2012) and others discuss the problem of a proliferation of rather confusing terminological variants in the field of „interculturality," all entailing very different ways of treating cultural matters in intercultural contacts, thus indicating the coexistence of multiple and sometimes contradictory approaches to facilitating the process of developing (inter)cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. Hence the need to better define the process of (inter)cultural communication negotiation.

A helpful analysis of the sociological paradigms that govern the way we think about intercultural communication within the academy and in everyday attitudes can be deduced from Holliday (2012, 37-49), who proposes two distinctive trends in approaching intercultural topics, namely, *neo-essentialism* and *critical cosmopolitanism*. On the one hand, Holliday recognises the main aspects of neo-essentialism mainly in liberal multiculturalism, describing it as an interest in celebrating and sharing artefacts, festivals, ceremonies, dress, food, and customs as a "bland," "indulgent" superficiality that can mask a neo-racist attitude as celebrating recognition of cultural diversity, while drawing lines and creating divisions between people from different cultural backgrounds, particularly between the inner circles (Western groups) and the outer circle (non-Western groups), and also alienating personal identities as though they were a "spectacle" (Holliday, 2012). On the other hand, the notion of critical cosmopolitanism is, according to Holliday, supported by Max Weber's (1964, quoted in Holliday 2012, p. 38) social action theory, which views "culture as a negotiated „process" that is far more difficult to pin down" (Holliday, 2012, p. 38), since the precise

nature of human behaviour can never be determined. This view of culture eludes any attempt at describing it in terms of prototypical nationalist or ethnic culture. Thus, intercultural communication can be explained as "the dialogue between underlying universal cultural processes and the particularities of national or other structures" (Holliday 2012, p. 46) and as a process of negotiation and co-construction of meaning that has "the potential to be transported across the cultural boundaries" (Holliday 2012, p. 43).

In order to be able to negotiate meaning and thus mediate between cultures and languages, *intercultural communicative competence* builds strongly on the linguistic element (Byram, 1997), an element that Holliday does not seem to address specifically when proposing to build *intercultural competence* on "universal cultural processes" that help learners transcend intercultural lines (Holliday 2012, p. 48). However, Byram (2012, p. 92) in his latest writing places language at the centre of intercultural communicative competence, claiming that "intercultural communication should be viewed as mediation among bilinguals who take advantage of a lingua franca, a foreign language that all the participants in the communicative activity have in common because they had learned it."

Such a transnational communication process is further deconstructed in Karen Risager's research. By focusing on conversations in which participants speak from different cultural backgrounds even if they speak the „same" language, for example English, she identifies "the need of a linguaculture concept that is linked with the language of the individual (the idiolect), and that allows for the idea that when the individual moves into a context other than the first language context, a new facet of cultural complexity is created" (Risager, 2008, p. 4). Since language is learned and developed in social interaction, learning and communicating in a second language becomes just an extension of the meaning negotiating process acquired in the mother tongue, exploiting the resources from the first language linguaculture in the process of sense making in the new language. However, the personal connotations of words and phrases will be transferred from the first language to the second languages in a kind of language mixture, "where my foreign language is supplied with linguacultural matter from my first language" and the learners need to "establish an association, and this task has to be accomplished on the basis of my growing understanding of some of the associations common among native speakers" (Risager, 2008, p. 6). The addressees, on the other hand, interpret the message by integrating it in their own linguacultures and their knowledge of the world.

The transnational paradigm proposed by Karen Risager seems to meet Adrian Holliday's concept of critical cosmopolitanism at this point, both in terms of emphasizing the process of deconstruction of meaning in actual encounters of individuals, as well as in analysing communication as a cultural and social

practice. Intercultural communicative competence thus becomes a critical reading of the meaning negotiating process within an intercultural encounter, prompting an individual to draw on the awareness of his/her cultural and linguistic background, while also compelling him/her to open to new conceptualisations of meaning. The resulting communication should help break down barriers and divisions produced by cultural stereotypes, prejudice and even racism, which is one of the main goals of the IEREST resources.

3. Piloting IEREST teaching materials: A case study

This paper presents the approach used in piloting one of the units of the IEREST Manual, namely, Activity 2 from the Pre-departure Module, entitled *Anti-discrimination study circle* (see also Appendix A).

The main aim of this activity is to encourage students to reflect on discrimination and new forms of racism appearing in our societies that go beyond skin colour, race or ethnicity. It shows how the role of power is related to the idea of essentialism and how it can touch upon everyone through implicit or explicit processes of communication, grounded in the popularised view of culture as a divisive set of national boundaries that still very much pervade the normal way of thinking.

In order to trigger critical evaluation of such practices, self-reflection and questioning of our own behaviour and language use, students are introduced to analytical tools (see also Appendix C) derived from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Jiwani, & Richardson, 2011; Van Dijk, 1984, 1987), guiding them to identify specific language choices through which discrimination is created and perpetuated. Initially students analyse examples of language use by examining the media (TV news and the Internet) and popular discourse; at the second stage, they are asked to apply the newly acquired analytical skills in a small-scale research evidencing suspect practices in their own environment.

We considered it particularly important to facilitate students" questioning those resources in language that we tend to take for granted, but can inform racist language by creating divisions, or else help us overcome such divisions once we perceive them, expose them and reject them.

The approaches described here expand slightly the activities proposed by the IEREST Manual, introducing additional opportunities for students to study, research and analyse language use in their first language (or better "linguaculture") and transfer these insights to situations where they engage in conversation in their second language, in this case English as "a lingua franca."

Our adapted version drew mainly on two objectives of the activity *Anti-discrimination study circle*, namely:

— Explore the role of power in dominant discourses (media, political, institutional) and reflect on how these discourses lead to perceiving people from other backgrounds in certain ways.

— Understand how key concepts such as stereotyping, ethnocentrism, essentialising, and prejudice can lead to misunderstandings and misrepresentations of people from other horizons.

However, the linguistic objectives of this activity were modified to some degree, in order to reflect better additional tasks introduced in our group. In terms of language analysis, we aimed at observing the following:

— Consider the problematic nature of using certain terms in your mother tongue (derogating expressions or even ethnic slurs for various minorities and nationals from other cultures).

— Consider the process of acquisition and interiorisation of the connotative meaning of vocabulary in general and, specifically, of derogating expressions in a second language.

Thus, the expected outcomes achieved at the end of the piloted activity were adapted as follows:

— Recognize and explain the problematic nature of using certain terms (e.g. ethnicity, race, nation) to frame identity.

— Recognize how the subjective worldview inherent in a number of frequently used expressions may be influenced by your primary and secondary socialisation and by the dominant discourses (media, political, institutional); and how the worldview inherent in these expressions influences your perceptions of yourself and (your interactions with) others.

— Recognise when misunderstandings may be the result of stereotyping, ethnocentrism, essentialising and prejudice.

— Recognize the process of transferring your personal connotations of words and phrases from the first language to the second languages and the process of perceiving and acquiring new, subtle meaning variations.

The activity was taught as part of a course on intercultural mediation to a group of 22 undergraduate students. The majority of the students participating were Slovene, along with a few students from Slovakia, Macedonia, Romania, Poland and Italy, visiting our institution within the Erasmus mobility exchange programme. The course based on the IEREST resources Module 1 lasted throughout the term (60 contact hours), devising some 20 hours to Activity 2 (*Anti-discrimination study circle*). The majority of students studied English as their major and were able to communicate in English at an advanced level, so that the course was held in English.

4. The tasks

The activity included two main tasks, namely, a critical reading of the mediated texts/messages and a research of denigrating vocabulary used in each student's environment. At the first stage, students were introduced to the concept of „discrimination" (i.e., the denial of opportunities and equal rights to individuals and groups based on some type of arbitrary bias such as gender, race, social class, etc.) by reflecting on their personal experiences and/or commenting on episodes that happened to others, including those reported in the media. The focus of this task was then geared towards a critical reading of the language used in the media as illustrated by a video clip of a report by Al Jazeera from 2013 on the "Go home!" campaign organized by the UK Government and aimed at cutting the number of undocumented immigrants. Based on insights from CDA, summarized in a handout (See also Appendix C), students were guided to observe specific language strategies in expressing contempt and nuances of racism (euphemisms, intensifiers, hedging, down-toning) in the video clip and in the comments made by the viewers. As an extension of this task, students analysed various media reports and blogs discussing recent immigration issues in their mother tongue and in English (American, English and international sources) along the lines proposed by the CDA tools. The results of the research in various languages was then compared and contrasted.

At the second stage, an expansion of the original teaching materials was introduced. Based on a research on race, racism and racist talk (Elamé, 2006), the focus of students" research was reverted to biased language and ethnic slurs in everyday conversations. Students were divided in a number of small groups, each researching a slightly different aspect of vocabulary or drawing on different language tools, such as vocabularies and language corpora, to identify biased or even racist language practices. One strand of research analysed the denigrating language popularly used to discuss various minorities and national cultural stereotypes in their first language, another one identified frequently used racist language (subtle or overt) in the media, yet another group investigated the response to commonly used denigrating expressions and ethnic slurs among primary school children.

Students worked on their research assignments independently for a month and finally presented the results in a presentation with discussion in a focus group. They wrapped up their findings and comments in a reflective essay.

5. Findings

The initial discussion with the students regarding racism and racist language practices in their own environment indicated that they had very little awareness of these issues and their response was one of overt denial. Especially Slovene students claimed that the Slovene language had not developed racist or biased language due to the history of colonisation of the region, the very limited number of speakers of the Slovene language and few contacts with peoples of other races. They supported their claim alleging that even the word *zamorec* (a Slovene biased word for *a black person*) originally meant just "a person from overseas." Their research soon proved them wrong.

Even a rather superficial investigation of the language strategies in expressing contempt, bias and nuances of racism in the media yielded interesting results. Students discovered that newspapers were particularly rich in expressing subtle bias when reporting on recent migrations. Little distinction was made between *begunec* (refugee), *pribežnik* (immigrant), *migrant* (an adopted word with a somewhat more formal connotation), *azilant* (asylum seeker), *ilegalni prebežnik* (undocumented immigrant), frequently suggesting that they were all just economic migrants, undeserving of readers" sympathy. Furthermore, migrations were mainly described as a "problem" or a "crisis" threatening to "flood" or "swamp" with a "wave" our "way of life" and our "already impoverished economy," apparently as a natural phenomenon that one cannot control. The government thus decided to erect a barrier of razor wire, declaring that it was just a "technical obstruction" (a technical term) or "fence," meant to "protect the population" and not to "intimidate" anyone. The range of vocabulary retrieved from comments to newspaper stories and blogs showed more overt bias or even hostility, talking frequently about "illegals" or even the "Byzantine" (a term with negative connotation suggesting backwardness and lack of sophistication), who would only cause "chaos" and linking migrants to criminals, human trafficking, fraud, harassment and aggression.

Very similar were the results of the research of the daily papers in the other countries included in this research, although in some countries the papers seemed to emphasize the religious element more, identifying the migrants often as Muslims, thus eliciting resentment towards migrants among readership, due to historical tensions between religions in the local environments.

The analysis of a few articles and blogs in English supplied a wider set of vocabulary to name migrants and their activities, focusing mainly on the skin colour (*blacks, browns, niggers*), or the religion (various denominations of Islam), who *come flooding or swarming into the gates* of our world and want *to rip it apart with their backward culture, primitive political habits and destructive*

(anti)social norms. Students also recognized instances of mitigation of the message (*Prejudice is something almost automatic in our society.*), reversal (*They impinge upon white people's rights.)* and apparent concession (*I have no problems with any race but if he's going to live in . . . [a country], he needs to ensure respect for the culture he's joining and make sure he becomes one of us!*), and many more. They found such language disturbingly aggressive towards minorities, but also recognized that they had difficulties grasping the connotative meaning of the vocabulary they were less familiar with or concepts not yet clearly mapped in their first language, or words that exist in their language as well but refer to a different concept in English, for egzample, reference to Islamic sects, "*coloured people,*" "*aliens.*"

Similarly, students discovered that it was difficult to render in English precisely the meaning of some biased language, which they found mainly in blogs discussing issues related to local ethnic minorities and bordering nations. Examples of such ethnocentric vocabulary in Slovene referred mainly to traditional ethnic minorities mingling with Slovenes in their immediate environment, like the Romani peoples (*cigan, cigo*), or more recent migrants from the Balkan region, such as the Bosnians (*čefur*), or the Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia (*Šiptar*), or any person from the southern Yugoslav republics (*Južnjak*). Other examples express prejudice against inhabitants from our neighbouring countries like the Italians (*Lah*) or people from German speaking countries (*Švab*). The Italian students contributed some uniquely Italian disparaging expressions for more recent migrants from Africa in their country, such as *vu-comprà* (a hassling street seller of colour), marocchino (any dark skin person), but also a denigrating word for Slovenes and other nations from former Yugoslavia: *sciavo* (slang for "slave").

The realisation that we often have such words at the tip of the tongue and even use them carelessly, triggered quite some reflection as to what attitudes and values we project unawares. Students further discovered that our colloquial vocabulary shows bias also towards women, older people, the LGBT community and people with all kinds of handicap, thus creating quite stark divisions between members of our society and allowing prejudice to thrive. They considered the implications of transferring such expressive vocabulary between languages. They admitted that it was tempting to adopt such vocabulary, along with all kinds of swearwords, from other languages, since foreign biased words are not anchored in our value system, rendering fuzzy their exact connotative or expressive meaning and their bias. As a consequence, we can offend or even hurt people's feelings inadvertently.

Some students wanted to research the origin of such prejudice, as well as the extent to which denigrating words were used among students of primary schools. They went to various schools and administered to a hundred elementary school pupils aged between 10 and 15 years a simple questionnaire (See also Appendix D), thus collecting a revealing sample of data.

The answers can be summarized in just a few lines:

— Pupils immediately recognized all denigrating words and slurs quoted in the questionnaire and were able to explain their biased meaning, as well as the group of people they referred to.
— They learned these words mainly outside the school, in the family, among their peers or from the media, as shown in Chart 1.

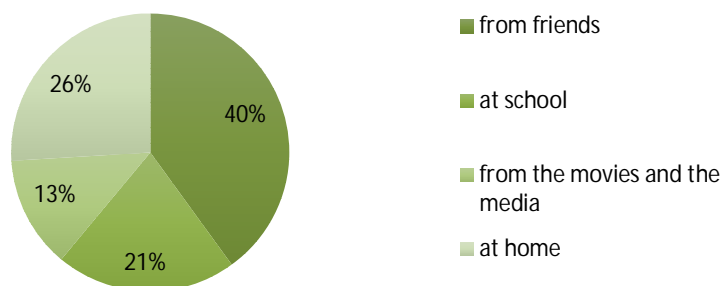Where did you learn denigrating words for other nationals?

Figure 1 Environments where pupils from the elementary school learned biased words

— They were able to describe all the negative connotations of such words and reported harboring some negative feeling for people designated by such words, although they rarely had any direct contacts with persons from these ethnic groups and, therefore, had little first-hand experience or contacts with them (Chart 2).

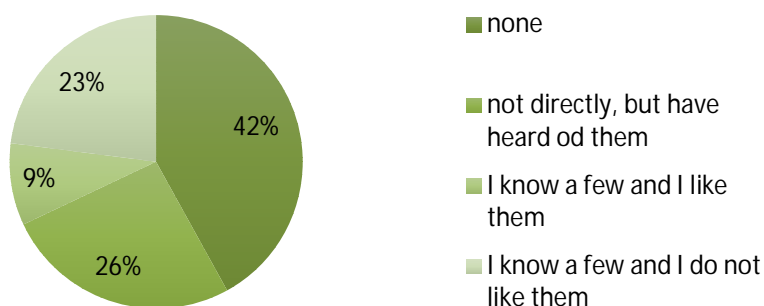Have you ever met/do you know people designated by these denigrating words?

Figure 2 Frequency of direct contacts with people described by denigrating words

— Still, almost a third of the interviewees openly expressed negative attitudes towards these ethnic groups, while half of the pupils claimed that people from different ethnic groups were no different from themselves, though they may have some different customs and should thus be treated as equals (Chart 3).

What are your feelings towards people described by such slurs?

- a normal person such as me
- a person with different customs
- a person whose manners I do not approve of
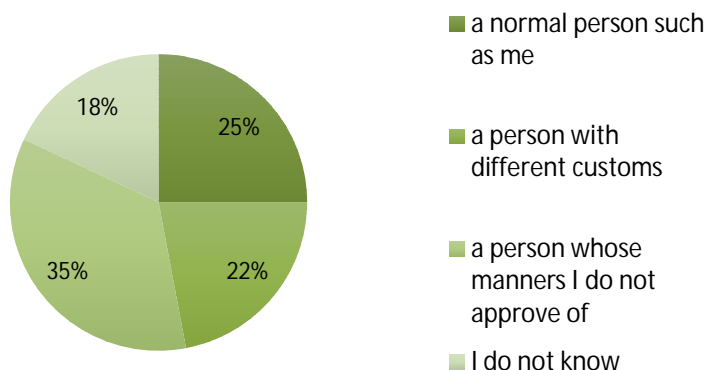- I do not know

Figure 3 Attitudes to people from ethnic groups designated by racial slurs

The final focus-group discussion among students led to the conclusion that we should be more aware of the language we adopt even in light conversations, because it became obvious that expressions such as "*lažeš kot cigan*" (you lie like a gypsy), "*delam kot zamorc*" (I work like a nigger – work hard at menial jobs as a servant) can create divisions in our minds when we do not reflect on our language. Such lack of cultural and language awareness can lead to an early conditioning to ethnocentrism, racism and even xenophobia. The responses acquired from pupils surprised our students as to how impressionable their young minds were and how easily they adopted discriminatory stances from their environment. Recommendations were formulated as to the various manners to improve our behavior, in order to avoid creating divisions through language between peoples in our society and beyond.

6. Students' feedback

In their reflective essays students acknowledged that issues raised during this course led them to a new awareness of how language can be used to create new divides among ethnic and social groups or to promote and reinforce stereotypes and prejudice. At the same time, they emphasized the need to sensitize their environment to observe language critically, to realise the damage and even pain

we can cause by reproducing denigrating language patterns and, therefore, to shun from biased expressions. Some of their views quoted below emphasize mainly the intercultural insights gathered within the course:

> In many cases, negative stereotypes are being spread within countries in order to manipulate with people's beliefs and create tension between different ethnic groups that would maybe otherwise coexist peacefully. Stereotypes are being used as a powerful strategic weapon in politics all over the world. (Borut – not the real name)

> The problem is that people talk about intercultural communication instead of interpersonal communication. In this way, they emphasise that people come from different cultures so there must be some differences. If we talk about interpersonal communication people tend to see similarities between humans instead of differences. (Robert – not the real name)

> Even if we never completely eradicate certain bad, negative stereotypes, we are becoming more aware of them and of the effect they have on us. We should always bear in mind that as much as someone may look or feel weird to us, it goes the other way around too. The need for tolerance is essential, **though** sometimes it is a difficult exercise. **Look beyond the stereotype!** (Melissa – not the real name)

> I think that in our modern society people should learn from childhood the meaning of respecting each other and respecting the different, not to judge anything or anybody they do not know, not to block the evidence and external signs, but observe the similarities rather than the differences. We should not speak about cultures as closed entities but as something that influences one another and so it is part of each other's culture. Only after having managed to reconstruct a balanced society where equality prevails, it is possible to coexist. (Vane – not the real name)

> A solution that could help the decrease of racism could be the exchange of discriminating words with other terms. Because it is already difficult to be in a place where everything is new: behaviour, language, life style, and it is even more difficult to live in a place where you are clearly not welcome. (Marija – not the real name)

Other students focused more on the use of language and the consequences of ethnically biased expressions:

> Language must serve as a tool for improving a dialogue between cultures. It should be a language of unity, tolerance and peace. A more conscious perception can help to negate much of that racism in language. While we may not be able to change the language, we can definitely change our usage of the language. We can avoid using words that degrade people. We can make a conscious effort to use terminology that reflects a tolerant perspective, as opposed to a discriminative perspective. The important thing is to respect each other as equal human beings who share and exercise the same rights, inhabit the same world and breathe the same air. If the human kind manages to succeed in this, the world will be a much nicer and friendlier place. Yet there is still a lot of work ahead of us. (Erika– not the real name)

> Pupils' opinions was based on what their parents implemented in their earlier childhood and not on what they actually experience. We noticed similar patterns in other groups that were conducting surveys on other ethnic slurs. This was a clear reason why we should be aware of the discriminatory vocabulary, this goes especially for parents and what they say to their children. This is important because young children are more prone to the bias hidden in such expressions, which can lead to unnecessary violence or discrimination against people that mean you no harm. This course opened a new perspective to us and made us aware of the damage the usage of such discriminatory vocabulary may cause, a fact that we did not even consider before. (Lea – not the real name)

It is encouraging to notice that even a rather short course on intercultural issues can engender such enthusiasm among students and have them reflect deeply on their own values, believes and language practices. In our view, the approach introduced in this pilot was particularly productive, because it proposed to students to, first, observe practices in their own environment and, later, expand their observations to a larger group of people and languages. They were able to draw conclusions from their own experience and then generalize their findings, internalizing their newly acquired knowledge as a responsibility to share with younger generation and their environment.

7. Conclusion

The research showed that a critical study of language use in our environment – everyday conversations and media discourse - can have implications for communication in "lingua franca," thus enhancing students" intercultural awareness and sensibility. It has revealed that a divisive set of practices persists in our understanding of communication across cultural boundaries. It is particularly important to have students observe and investigate these aspects of relating among people, in order to help them grasp how these divisions are created and how the meaning that we ascribe to words influences our attitudes, as well as our relating to persons from various groups, unless we reflect and become aware of our own bias. Students" conclusions and recommendations propose that language can actually be a tool, which helps us overcome the distances and differences among individuals. What we need is the will to observe critically our own wording of reality around us, to perceive the cultural prejudice inherent in many casual conversations, expose such language practices and try to alter them. This may, in turn, help us develop empathy and aid us to see through stereotypes and prejudice, thus enhancing greatly our ability to understand and relate to people in an intercultural encounter.

The findings of this research seem to confirm that both, foreign language learning and developing intercultural competence draw on the meaning negotiating

process acquired in the first linguaculture, as proposed by Risager (2012). Developing a deeper awareness of this negotiating process and an understanding of the principles at work in transnational interactions can help us establish a dialogue between underlying universal cultural processes and the particularities of national or other structures, thus enabling a process of negotiation and co-construction of meaning that can help us communicate more successfully across cultural boundaries, as advanced by Holliday (2012). This seems to imply that the kind of empathy needed to perceive and understand particularities of different cultural backgrounds is also required to understand and interiorize the mapping of new meaning in a second language, thus expanding our field of knowledge of the world. Such an attitude to intercultural communication in international encounters seems to open new opportunities to successfully engage with people and situations that students meet within their Erasmus sojourn.

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Appendix A:
Anti-discrimination study circle – Brief description of activities (adapted version)

Task	Brief description of procedures
Task 1 Waking up to racism in our lives	• Introduce the activity and its objectives. • Stimulate class discussion on students' experiences of discriminatory practices in their own environment and elsewhere. • Provide explanations of some theoretical concepts (e.g., "discrimination," "racism" and "neo-racism").
Task 2 "Go home!"	• Show a video clip of a report by Al Jazeera on the "Go Home" campaign in the UK. • Split the class into groups and ask them to answer the questions in Attachment 1. • Discuss the answers to the questions in plenary.
Task 3 Focus on language	• Provide further explanation of the concept of discrimination by investigation of students' national and local media. • Introduce discourse analysis. • Ask students to analyse the comments posted under the Al Jazeera video clip with the help of Attachment 3.
Task 4 Localisation of racism	• Ask students to research denigrating vocabulary in use in your environment (books, blogs, media, dictionaries, conversations). • In pairs students design a simple questionnaire and administer it to a group of elementary school children (aged between 10 and 15 years). • Help students analyse the answers and ask them to reflect on the results. • Ask students to prepare a presentation of their findings. • Encourage a class discussion in order to summarise the main point of the activity. • Ask students to wrap up their observations a reflective essay.

Appendix B:
"Go home" Campaign (Task 2, Unit: Anti-discrimination study circle)

Answer the following questions in your group.

1 What message is implied in the "Go-home" campaign?

2 Who is the campaign aimed at?

3 What attitude does the campaign express towards all immigrants, whether legal or illegal?

4 How are the illegal immigrants named and referred to?

5 How are the immigrants described? What qualities or characteristics are attributed to them?

6 What is the political motivation behind such a campaign (i.e., to win votes)?

7 The reporter uses the term "racial profiling." What does this term mean? What ideological stance does this term suggest (e.g., towards immigrant groups)?

8 Which representatives of society or authorities are asked to give an opinion on the matter? What arguments do they present about the immigrants and against the campaign?

9 How do you know whose point of view is presented? Is it that of the "dominant group," or of the "out-group"?

10 Can you identify any euphemisms, intensifiers, or down-toning? What effect do these devices have on the presentation of the issue?

Appendix C:
Focus on language: CDA tools (Task 3: Anti-discrimination study circle unit)

Contemporary ethical and racial prejudices are mostly denied in everyday conversations and in mass-mediated contexts; however a subtle wording strategy betrays underlying attitudes towards "out-groups."

Thus arguments, e.g., about Them and Us, can also be advanced by using less direct strategies such as *disclaimers*. These *disclaimers* are semantic manoeuvres that combine an overall strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, and include moves such as:

Apparent Denial: "I have nothing against immigrants, but . . ."
The speaker first introduces a mitigating claim, but gives no evidence that he/she has nothing against "them." The preliminary denial often serves just as a face-keeping move to introduce a generally negative assertion.
Denials are a strategy of *defence*, presupposing explicit or implicit accusations, and can be divided in several types:
1. act-denial: "I did not do/say that at all";
2. control-denial "I did not do/say that on purpose," "It was an accident";
3. intention-denial "I did not mean that," "You got me wrong";
4. goal-denial "I did not do/say that, in order to . . .'
Subtle Denial: "They claim /allege that 'quotation of somebody's words' . . ."
Observe what effect is achieved by explicitly quoting the official replies from the government spokesperson. Quotes are a device of distancing from an opinion, meaning "I did not say this, they did . . .," as well as a strategy rendering the information more factual or objective.
Apparent Concession: "Of course *some* Muslims are tolerant, but generally . . ."
Conceding exceptions makes the claim sound more objective and helps the speaker/writer to appear more tolerant.
Apparent Empathy: "Of course asylum seekers endure hardships, but . . ."
Showing empathy and understanding for the "out-group" makes the speaker/writer to appear more tolerant.
Apparent Ignorance: "Now, I don't know all the facts, but . . ."
This is a face-saving strategy, since the speaker/writer admits in advance a lack of knowledge, allowing them to make an even wilder claim.
Reversal: "*We* are the real victims in all this . . ."
The roles of the victims and the perpetrators are inverted with this clever manoeuvre.
Transfer: "Of course, I have nothing against them, but my customers don't like to deal with black personnel . . ."
Blaming others for one's own position, actions etc. gives the speaker/writer an excuse for their behaviour.
Mitigation: "The message may sound *rather* unpleasant, still they . . ."
"This may be a *loaded* connotation, but . . ."

Using intensity markers such as emphasising particles ("really," "very," "absolutely," "only")" or expressions mitigating and attenuating the claim ("doubtfully," "questionably," "trivial," "insufficient") can be an important aspect of the discourse as they either sharpen or tone down its ideational content and help construct a particular (perhaps "non-racist") identity for the speaker or writer.
(adapted from van Dijk et al., 1997 and Jiwani, Y., & Richardson, J.E., 2011)

Appendix D:
Students" Questionnaire for Elementary School Pupils
(Task 4: Anti-discrimination study circle unit)

1 What do you understand under the word "šiptar" (or "cigan" or "čefur" or "zamorc" and similar)?
2 Where did you first come across this word?
3 How do you imagine such a person and what are his/her characteristics? Are they different from you?
4 What is your experience with persons denoted by the word "šiptar" (or "cigan" or "čefur" or "zamorc" and similar)?