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Exploring cultural knowings in language learning: the case of Turkish mobility students

Anna Franca Plastina

Abstract

Nowadays, it is widely accepted that culture and language are closely related (Nieto 2002) and that research and language pedagogy need to link language teaching to that of culture (Kramsch 1998). This paper draws from the experience of a teacher mobility stay at the Technical University of Istanbul in Turkey to run a short Italian language preparation course for a group of Turkish tertiary students before their mobility stay in Italy. The paper first examines the key issue of how cultural knowings play a decisive role in building a new centre of interaction (Alred et al. 2002) in intercultural encounters, as they underlie different intercultural abilities. It then considers the importance of learning how to develop repertoires of cultural knowings in mobility language learning contexts, where the language teacher's roles are decisive in building these first steps towards intercultural competence. Following Moran's (2001) Cultural Knowings Framework, the paper reports on the case study carried out to diagnose the Turkish tertiary students' cultural knowings: knowing how (cultural practices), knowing why (cultural perspectives), knowing oneself (self-awareness), knowing about (cultural information), whilst still in their safe cultural environment. Diagnostic findings were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively, and then systematised using the Intercultural Competence Assessment (INCA) framework (Byram et al. 2004). Calibrating students' initial levels of intercultural competence was insightful to tailor course objectives in order to enable them to broaden their cultural knowings. In turn, this learning process was helpful in sensitising students' cultural mindset before facing the challenges of a new cultural environment.

1. Introduction

Increased mobility in today's world leads to a multiplicity of interactions and encounters with *otherness*¹, which inevitably create cultural and communicative challenges. In the field of international cooperation between Higher Education institutions, these challenges acquire a particular significance when related to intensive language preparation courses on exchange programmes. Such courses, which aim at enabling exchange students to function socially and academically in a host country, are often supplemented with in-house training, cooperatively run by host language teaching staff at students' home institutions. Despite the fact that this experience is short (maximum two weeks), it can offer future mobility students a valuable opportunity to gain intercultural awareness, whilst still in their own *safe* cultural environment. However, this is feasible only when mobility language teachers are willing to reflect on some pedagogical issues. Firstly, they need to be aware that "while learning a foreign language, the learner will bring his own culture into the communication process with the foreign culture [...]" (Fenner 2000:149). Subsequently, mobility language teachers ought to place learners' intercultural competence at the forefront of language learning. Beacco & Byram (2003: 34) claim that "intercultural competence and the capacity for intercultural mediation are thus one of the potential goals of language teaching [...] to acquire a capacity [which] is fundamental for interacting with people of other languages and cultures [...]". In so doing, mobility language teachers should strive to raise students' awareness of their own culture, taking on roles to enhance their understanding of the culture of their future host country.

Drawing from the experience of a teacher mobility stay at the Technical University of Istanbul, this paper reports on research carried out to diagnose a group of Turkish students' "ability to bring the culture of origin and the foreign culture into relation with each other" (Council of Europe 2001:103). In the first part of the paper, the concept of *cultural knowings* and Moran's framework are introduced. Significant aspects of intercultural competence in the mobility language learning context are then related to the different role(s) that should be enacted by the language teacher. Subsequently, the research study is presented and its findings are discussed.

¹ A somewhat flexible concept, deriving from Freudian psychiatry, which argues that human beings inevitably define themselves against what they are not: the "other".

2. Cultural knowings and Moran's framework

Alfred *et al.* (2002:4-5) claim that “the locus of interaction is not in the centripetal reinforcement of the identity of one group and its members by contrast with others, but rather in the centrifugal action of each which creates a new centre of interaction on the borders and frontiers which join rather than divide them”. Cultural knowings play a decisive role in building this *new centre of interaction* as they underlie a number of abilities which contribute to the *centrifugal action*. These abilities include:

- a. *reflecting and introspecting culturally* which retrieves cultural knowings dealing with self-awareness;
- b. *constructing intercultural knowing as social action*. This ability is built on cultural knowings of our socio-cultural, political, linguistic, ethical knowledge, values and beliefs based on our enculturation and socialisation²;
- c. *connecting the intracultural with the intercultural* which depends on cultural knowings of the interrelation and interdependence of our own language and culture in the construction of concepts, values and beliefs. These knowings contribute to ways of perceiving our world variably and diversely across languages and cultures;
- d. *assuming responsibility based on intercultural attitudes*. Cultural knowings of our motivation, sensitivity, empathy, tolerance and respect for otherness support us in acting as responsible intercultural communicators who are willing to respect diversity and accept changes;
- e. *interacting and communicating intercultural* which means retrieving knowledge of the reciprocal relationship between our own system of social and linguistic *knowing as action* and all other such systems. These knowings support us in fine-tuning our understanding of the relationship between our language and culture and other languages and cultures.

As individuals work on expanding their repertoires of cultural knowings, they gradually acquire intercultural abilities and learn to construct appropriate action strategies which support them in different intercultural interactions. Hence, the challenge of intercultural

² The adoption of the behaviour patterns of the surrounding culture and the adherence to the norms of that culture, largely through imitation and social control exerted by group action.

interactions lies not so much in avoiding cultural clashes or even in resolving intercultural conflicts, but rather in having potentially richer and more varied repertoires of cultural knowings available, and in skilfully tapping them to achieve goals. Conversely, individuals, who are unaware of the potentials of their repertoires, are more likely to retrieve biased and/or stereotyped constructions of otherness and ought to engage in awareness-raising activities. For this purpose, Moran's Cultural Knowings Framework is a useful tool as it is "a means of describing culture in terms of what students need to do in order to learn it" (Moran 2001:15). The Framework is based on four processes through which a culture outsider will learn to access and understand otherness: *knowing about*, *knowing how*, *knowing why*, *knowing oneself*. Moving from the uninvolved to the involved state of *knowing oneself* is the starting point to process individual "values, opinions, feelings, questions, reactions, thoughts, ideas and own cultural values as a central part of the cultural experience" (Moran *op. cit.*: 17). *Knowing oneself* requires the learner to engage in reflective processes which develop self-awareness. *Knowing how* describes "behaviors, actions, skills, saying, touching, looking, standing or other forms of doing" (Moran *op. cit.*: 16) and involves the learner in skill-based activities on cultural practices to perform appropriate cultural behaviours. *Knowing how* is a prerequisite to *knowing why*, i.e., understanding the reasons for "perceptions, beliefs, values and attitudes that underlie or permeate all aspects of culture" (Moran *op. cit.*: 16). *Knowing why* involves the learner in discovering, understanding and explaining cultural perspectives. In turn, this leads to *knowing about* "facts, data, or knowledge about products, practices and perspectives of a culture" (Moran *op. cit.*: 15). *Knowing about* addresses cultural information as learning content and engages the learner in information-gathering activities.

Thus, learning how to develop these repertoires is fundamental to acquire a set of intercultural abilities to interact in an interculturally competent way. Although these learning processes are paramount in mobility language learning contexts, their implementation depends on whether language teachers are willing to take on different roles to ensure that this occurs.

3. Mobility language learning contexts: the teacher's role(s) and cultural knowings

When mobility students decide to do in-house training, they implicitly have some positive attitudes towards the target language and culture. Taking actions to reinforce learners' initial motivation and to help them develop cultural self-awareness is one of the language teacher's first responsibilities. These actions should overcome the common praxis of *tacitly* comparing and contrasting source and target language and culture, as it does not cater for students' development of their cultural knowings. Furthermore, in new academic, cultural and linguistic environments, mobility teachers soon realise they are not only target language teachers, as they bring their target culture into students' *safe* cultural environment. This summons them to act as mediators between source and target cultures, with a neutral, flexible and sensitive stance towards their learners' views. Gay (2000:42), in fact, sees teachers as *cultural mediators* who "[...] provide opportunities for students to engage in critical dialogue about conflicts between cultures and to analyse inconsistencies between mainstream cultural ideas/realities and those of different cultural systems. They help students clarify their ethnic identities, honor other cultures, develop positive cross-ethnic and cross-cultural relationships, and avoid perpetuating prejudices, stereotypes and racism". In addition, language teachers need to be *cultural organisers* as they "[...] must understand how culture operates in daily classroom dynamics, create learning atmospheres that radiate cultural and ethnic diversity, and facilitate high academic achievement for all students" (Gay *op. cit.*: 42). Ultimately, learners are social actors who will interact with other citizens in different cultural situations on equal terms. However, if mobility students carry their rooted social beliefs and culturally-shaped values with them abroad, they are more likely to face various challenges. Thus, teachers also need to act as *orchestrators of social contexts for learning* as they "[...] must recognise the important influence culture has on learning, and make teaching processes compatible with the sociocultural contexts and frames of reference of ethnically diverse students" (Gay *op. cit.*: 43). As cultural mediators, organisers and orchestrators, language teachers can induce students to gain awareness of the functional use of their cultural knowings. Before doing so, mobility teachers ought to act as *cultural ethnographers* who strive "to make other cultures intelligible" (Rosaldo

1989:1). This can be done by carrying out research to diagnose learners' repertoires of cultural knowings.

4. The case study

4.1. Participants

Nineteen Turkish tertiary students (nine males and ten females), coming from two different faculties (Engineering and Architecture) and from two different universities (fourteen from the Technical University of Istanbul and five from Marmara University), agreed to participate in the research carried out at the beginning of a one-week Italian language preparation course run at the Technical University of Istanbul. Students were informed that the purpose of the research was to gain an understanding of their cultural knowings in order to tailor course objectives accordingly to their intercultural needs.

4.2. Methodology

The study was carried out in three phases: 1. diagnosing cultural knowings; 2. pinpointing competencies; 3. developing new cultural knowings. In the first phase, a survey was conducted following Moran's Framework with the aim of diagnosing students' cultural knowings. A questionnaire was purposely designed in English and administered to all participants to collect empirical data. The questionnaire was structured in three sections which respectively surveyed: 1. respondents' general background information (biodata, language education and course expectations); 2. their cultural self-awareness and their knowledge of Italian culture; 3. their repertoires of Italian culture practices and their understanding of the practices.

In the second phase, diagnostic findings were quantitatively and qualitatively calibrated to pinpoint participants' levels of intercultural competence (basic, intermediate or full), and to set upper levels as learning objectives. For the purpose, the assessor version of the Intercultural Competence Assessment (INCA) framework (Byram *et al.* 2004) was used. Survey findings were, in fact, correlated to the six INCA descriptors, namely, tolerance of ambiguity, behavioural flexibility,

communicative awareness, knowledge discovery, respect for otherness and empathy. In particular, findings on *knowing oneself* were correlated to *empathy* as the latter is seen to occur only when there is an underlying self-awareness. Findings on *knowing about* were correlated to *respect for otherness*, i.e., for other people's culture and *knowledge discovery*, i.e., the willingness to learn both in advance and from intercultural encounters. Moreover, results from participants' *knowing how* were calibrated against *communicative awareness* (awareness of possible misunderstandings due to differences in speech and body language) and *behavioural flexibility* (the ability to adapt one's own behaviour to other cultural patterns). Finally, findings on *knowing why* cultural situations occur were correlated to *tolerance of ambiguity*, i.e., the ability to tolerate the challenge of unexpectedness in intercultural encounters. New competency levels were set following the INCA descriptors, and used as learning objectives in the third study phase, when learners engaged in developing their repertoires of cultural knowings.

4.3. Research Instruments and Procedures

The questionnaire was structured in three sections which respectively surveyed: 1. respondents' general background information (biodata, language education and course expectations); 2. their cultural self-awareness, exploiting the Council of Europe (2001:11) reference framework and their knowledge of Italian culture; 3. their repertoires of Italian culture practices and their understanding of the practices. In particular, the second section was designed to capture a variety of responses on fundamental aspects of participants' *knowing oneself* and *knowing about*. Five open-ended questions were introduced to stimulate students' self-reflection on their *savoir-être*, or existential competence, which entails attitudes, motivations, values, beliefs, cognitive styles, personality factors, all contributing to *knowing oneself*. The same five open-ended questions were then used to focus on participants' *savoir*, or *declarative knowledge*, which includes intercultural awareness or *knowing about*. Thus, the five questions were articulated to allow respondents to express their cultural self-identity and their knowledge of Italian culture in terms of cultural uniqueness, characterisation, features (positive, negative), and representations.

In the third section, ten multiple-choice items were used to probe respondents' *knowing how* of Italian culture practices. As the small-scale study was time-constrained and could not survey these knowings in-depth, item choices were limited to some significant situational cultural practices embedding social habits (items 1-5) and intercultural social behaviour (items 6-10) (see Table 2 below). Distractors, referring to Turkish culture practices, were introduced for each multiple-choice item to yield discriminating responses. Thus, the main purpose in using these distractors was to understand whether students would choose responses reflecting their own cultural practices rather than any other of the suggested responses tied to *knowing how* of Italian culture practices. Moreover, each item was supported by an open-ended "*because...*" to elicit respondents' *knowing why* of the practice. In this way, *knowing why* was linked to *knowing how* to see whether respondents were competent in providing cultural reasons and explanations, or remained tied to ethnocentric cultural perspectives related to the aforementioned distractors.

5. Findings and Implications: Building the First Steps Towards Intercultural Competence

5.1. Diagnostic Findings

Data were collected anonymously from all nineteen respondents. Findings on general background information indicate that respondents were averagely aged 22 and that only four had already been to Italy on holidays for an average period of one week. All but one of the respondents (18) had studied English, 8 German, 1 Bulgarian in the Turkish public educational system. 12 respondents had studied Italian for a few months and 1 for one year, all in the private sector in Turkey, while 6 had never studied Italian before. As for course expectations, just over half (11) the respondents wished to work on oral fluency skills, 7 on host country culture and only 1 on grammar. Findings from the second part of the questionnaire show a divide between respondents' cultural self-awareness and their perception of otherness as shown in Table 1.

Questionnaire items	Responses	N° Respondents
1. What is unique in your opinion about your culture?	- bridge between Europe and Asia	11
	- different ethnic groups	5
	- diversity of religions	2
	- nomadic origins	1
2. What is the best thing about your culture?	- the cradle of civilizations	10
	- Turkish tolerance of different ethnic/religious groups	8
	- the Turkish language	1
3. What one thing would you change about your culture?	- low literacy levels	13
	- religious fanaticism	4
	- death penalty	2
4. What is the proudest moment in your cultural history?	- the foundation of the Turkish Republic	18
	- the change from the Arabic script to the Latin alphabet	1
5. What symbol would you pick to represent your culture?	- Mustafa Kemal Atatürk	17
	- national flag	2

6. What is unique in your opinion about Italian culture?	- creativity	13
	- fashion	4
	- food	2
7. What is the best thing about Italian culture?	- fashion	10
	- <i>Azzurri</i> soccer players	9
8. What one thing would you change about Italian culture?	- people's noisy behaviour/angry temper	14
	- mafia	4
	- politics	1
9. What is the proudest moment in Italian history?	- Renaissance	9
	- Dolce Vita	5
	- Fascism	5
10. What symbol would you pick to represent Italian culture?	- soccer	9
	- pizza	6
	- Ferrari	4

Table 1. Diagnostic findings on respondents' knowing oneself and knowing about

In particular, just over half the students (11) find their unique cultural values related to the geographical position of their country, and 5 to the co-existence of different ethnic groups. Again, just over half of the students (10) believe the best thing about Turkish culture is its being the cradle of civilizations, while 8 associate it to Turkish tolerance of ethnic/religious diversity. More than half (13) claim they would improve the population's level of literacy, whereas only 4 disapprove of religious fanaticism. In addition, almost all the respondents (18) feel that the proudest moment of their cultural history is related to the foundation of the Turkish Republic and, consistently, 17 chose Atatürk (founder of the Republic) and a further 2 the national flag as symbols of Turkish independence. While respondents appear to be culturally self-aware, their

responses indicate that they are widely influenced by their enculturation and socialisation. This means that they have a *passive* self-awareness, which needs to be awakened through guided ongoing reflectivity to enable them to become empathetic persons in contexts of diversity. Responses to questions 6-10 reveal, in fact, that students draw on random generalizations (e.g. item 6: creativity - 13; item 7: fashion - 10) or retrieve culturally-shaped biases (e.g. item 8: people's noisy behaviour/angry temper - 14; mafia - 4). These results show how respondents have limited declarative knowledge of Italian culture, and therefore need to develop and systematise their *knowing about* to enhance their intercultural awareness. Indeed, "knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of the target community' produce an intercultural awareness" (Council of Europe, 2001:43). Furthermore, Table 2 below illustrates diagnostic findings referring to respondents' *knowing how* and *knowing why*. Findings on *knowing how* reveal that participants widely used the Turkish cultural distractors (indicated in the questionnaire below with a "D") as responses to 7 items (no. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10), and that these were almost equally distributed between knowings on social habits and intercultural social behaviour. On the other hand, findings on items 1, 2, 9 show how responses concentrate on distorted generalisations. Thus, respondents either tended to relate Italian culture practices to their own in most cases, or retrieved their stereotyped knowings. It can therefore be envisaged that respondents lack the necessary knowings to identify differences in source and target cultural practices and that they probably have a weak ability to adapt to new cultural patterns. Findings on *knowing why* confirm this trend as they reveal respondents' culturally-shaped reasons and stereotyped explanations of Italian practices, which rely significantly on the Turkish cultural distractors given for *knowing how*.

Thus, in intercultural encounters which demand high involvement; respondents are likely to be overwhelmed by ambiguous situations, unable to tolerate the challenge of unexpectedness. Table 2 below also provides significant qualitative findings on *knowing why*. In particular, verbatim samples in italics are given as tokens of cultural explanations for the highest percentages of respondents' *knowing how*. Interestingly, the token "*it would be more appropriate for all*" (item 8) indicates that beyond the lack of competency in knowing why certain cultural things occur, the

respondent believes that “pastries” are more appropriate than “money” or “wine” possibly to avoid socio-cultural clashes or religious conflicts.

Questionnaire items	Responses	N° Respondents
A. Social Habits	a. only speech	==
1. <i>In daily life, Italians tend to communicate using...</i>	b. speech, facial expressions and gesturing	18
	c. speech and touching the other person's shoulder (D)	1
		==
<i>because...</i>	<i>...Italians always move their hands</i>	18
2. <i>The Italian attitude towards punctuality is best described as ...</i>	a. often deliberately late (D)	==
<i>because...</i>	b. flexible	4
	c. always late	15
	d. always punctual	==
	<i>Italians always take their time</i>	15
3. <i>In Italy, public displays of affection, anger or other emotions are...</i>	a. unusual and unacceptable	==
<i>because...</i>	b. fairly common and tolerated	4
	c. frowned upon (D)	15
	d. totally inappropriate	==
	<i>... emotions are private, intimate</i>	15
4. <i>In Italian workplaces, formality is best performed by...</i>	a. addressing people politely	7
<i>because...</i>	b. addressing people with their titles	==
	c. addressing people using Mr. and Mrs. (D)	12
	<i>Mr. and Mrs. is formal</i>	12

5. <i>The social role of Italian women is...</i> <i>because...</i>	a. secondary (D)	9
	b. their professional career	10
	c. staying at home	==
	<i>Men are the providers and women the nurturers</i>	9
	<i>Women are equal to men</i>	10
B. Intercultural Social Behaviour		
6. <i>I am meeting an Italian for the first time and want to make a good impression, I would talk about ...</i> <i>because...</i>	a. politics and religion	==
	b. weather and economy	2
	c. cuisine, heritage, sports, cinema etc.	4
	d. family and work (D)	13
	<i>family and work are the most important topics</i>	13
7. <i>When Italians see new people, they probably ...</i> <i>because...</i>	a. stare at them (D)	14
	b. act as if this were a normal event	4
	c. become suspicious	1
	<i>Italians are not used to diversity</i>	14
8. <i>If invited to a house for dinner in Italy, I would take ...</i> <i>because...</i>	a. a bottle of wine	2
	b. pastries (D)	17
	c. money	==
	<i>... it would be more appropriate for all</i>	17
9. <i>The best qualities to use when negotiating with Italians are...</i> <i>because...</i>	a. humility (D)	==
	b. patience	19
	c. aggression	==
	<i>Italians get easily upset</i>	19
10. <i>At a restaurant the bill is...</i> <i>because...</i>	a. paid by the host (D)	17
	b. paid by the guest	==
	c. shared	==
	d. paid according to the situation	2
	<i>hospitality is very important</i>	17

Table 2. Diagnostic findings on respondents' knowing how and knowing why

Overall, survey findings reveal that respondents have a *passive* cultural self-awareness and a *strong* stereotyped perception of Italian culture. Indeed, they tend to look at Italian culture primarily through their own enculturation. Survey findings also show that respondents' *knowings* of Italian cultural practices and their understanding of them are very basic.

5.2 Pinpointing competencies

When respondents' cultural knowings were calibrated to the INCA framework, their level of intercultural competence for each INCA element of competence was pinpointed as *basic* on the basis of the relative INCA descriptors as reported in Table 3.

Cultural knowings	INCA <i>Elements</i> of Competence	INCA Descriptors (Basic Level)
Knowing oneself	<i>Empathy</i>	"Tends to see the cultural foreigner's differences as curious..."
Knowing about	<i>Respect for otherness</i>	"Is not always aware of difference and, when it is recognised, may not be able to defer evaluative judgement as good or bad..."
	<i>Knowledge discovery</i>	"Draws on random general knowledge..."
Knowing how	<i>Communicative awareness</i>	"...lacks the necessary knowledge for identifying differences; tends to hold on to own conventions..."
	<i>Behavioural flexibility</i>	"Learns from isolated experiences in a rather unsystematic way".
Knowing why	<i>Tolerance of ambiguity</i>	"Deals with ambiguity on a one-off basis, responding to items as they arise..."

Table 3. Respondents' initial intercultural competence level following the INCA framework

Thus, enacting the role of *cultural ethnographer*, who diagnosed and calibrated her learners' initial repertoires of cultural knowings, allowed me to understand that the group of future mobility students had not "... yet got the experience to work out any system of dealing with intercultural situations in general" (INCA Level 1 Basic Competence). I

therefore took on the role of *cultural organiser* to attempt to understand how culture was to operate in the mobility language learning context. A crucial step in doing so was to set upper levels of intercultural competence in order to proceed in the pedagogical endeavour of teaching/learning to develop repertoires of cultural knowings. Thus, the INCA *intermediate* level of intercultural competence was examined. Details of each descriptor were pinpointed and matched to the *basic* level equivalents previously diagnosed. These detailed descriptors, shown in Table 4, were used to pursue learning objectives in the classroom.

Cultural knowings	INCA Elements of Competence	INCA Descriptors (Intermediate Level)
Knowing oneself	<i>Empathy</i>	"Tends increasingly to see things intuitively from the other's point of view"
Knowing about	<i>Respect for otherness</i> <i>Knowledge discovery</i>	"Is motivated to put others at ease and avoid giving offence". "Is motivated by curiosity to develop his knowledge of his own culture as perceived by others".
Knowing how	<i>Communicative awareness</i> <i>Behavioural flexibility</i>	"...Begins to relate problems of intercultural interaction to conflicting communicative conventions..." "Sometimes takes the initiative in adopting/conforming to other cultural's behaviour patterns".
Knowing why	<i>Tolerance of ambiguity</i>	"Has begun to acquire a repertoire of approaches to cope with ambiguities in low-involvement situations"

Table 4. Setting upper INCA levels of competencies as learning objectives

The next step consisted in identifying resources from the target language and culture that are "indicative" of that culture in *action*. This implied taking on the role of *orchestrator of social contexts for learning* and, therefore, choosing resources which, while being authentic texts, would lend themselves well to be flexible.

5.3. Developing new cultural knowings

Acting as a *cultural mediator*, I first decided to choose the authentic text of the popular song *l'Italiano* by Toto Cutugno to support learners in

working through guided reflective processes and cultural consciousness-raising activities to expand their cultural knowings. The developmental process mostly focussed on the cultural aspects as the group was surprisingly familiar with the lyrics of the song proposed. Thus, learners were first required to identify *intercultural keywords* in the text and to use these as socio-cultural *hypertextual pathways* (e.g. Italian history, economics, politics, religion, music, food and drinks etc.) which could be further explored actively through task-based activities subsequently introduced. As a result of this low-involvement cultural mediation process, the authentic text was then used to trigger a number of simple learner-generated intercultural texts. Table 5 illustrates a sample of learners' developmental process of *knowing about* focussed on the intercultural competence element of *knowledge discovery* at the INCA intermediate level. At this level, the learner works on the chosen authentic text "*motivated by curiosity to develop his knowledge of his own culture as perceived by others*".

Cultural Knowings: <i>Knowing about</i> INCA Element of Competence: <i>Knowledge discovery</i> INCA Level of Competence: <i>Intermediate</i>			
Authentic Text	Intercultural keywords	Socio-cultural hypertextual pathways	Sample Learner-generated intercultural text
Lasciatemi cantare/ <i>Let me sing</i> con la chitarra in mano/ <i>with a guitar in my hand</i> lasciatemi cantare/ <i>Let me sing</i> sono un italiano/ <i>I'm an Italian</i>	cantare cantare chitarra italiano	Music Ethnicity	Lasciatemi fumare / <i>Let me smoke</i> con il narghilè in mano/ <i>With a narghilè in my hand</i> lasciatemi fumare / <i>Let me smoke</i> sono un turco / <i>I'm a Turk</i>
Buongiorno Italia gli spaghetti al dente e un partigiano come Presidente con l'autoradio sempre nella mano destra e un canarino sopra la finestra	spaghetti al dente partigiano come Presidente l'autoradio canarino sopra la finestra	Food History Politics Economics Social Habits	Buongiorno Turchia il Kebap speziato e Atatürk come <i>Fondatore della Repubblica</i> con il thè sempre nella mano destra e un muezzin dalla moschea .
<i>Good-day Italy spaghetti al dente and a resistance fighter as President</i>			<i>Good-day Turkey spicy</i>

<i>with the car radio in your right hand and a canary above the window</i> Lasciatemi cantare/ <i>Let me sing perché ne sono fiero/ because I'm proud sono un italiano/I'm an Italian un italiano vero/A real Italian</i>	italiano vero	Cultural identity	<i>kebab and Atatürk as Founder of the Republic with your tea in your right hand and a muezzin from the mosque</i> Lasciatemi fumare / <i>Let me smoke perché ne sono fiero/ Because I'm proud sono un turco/I'm a Turk un turco vero/ a real Turk</i>
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Table 5. Sample of learners' developmental process of knowing about

After some short training, students had “begun to induce simple principles to apply to the situation, rather than improvise reactively in response to isolated features of it...” (INCA Intermediate General Profile). Thus, developing competence in *knowing about* requires students to strive for the objective of mastering information by engaging in learner-centred activities in which they reflect on the nature of the authentic cultural content proposed, and are guided by the teacher to describe and process their own information. However, *knowing about* is not just a matter of gathering factual information about another culture. It is pedagogically linked to discovering explanations which help enhance the competence of *knowing why*. In this case, the teacher ought to lead students through activities in which they are required to use their induction, analysis and intuition to interpret and explain cultural information, focussing on values and assumptions which are the core of the learning content. In the present case, students were encouraged to focus on a very common cultural practice mentioned in the authentic text, namely “*spaghetti al dente*”. During a group discussion, lead-in questions were used to elicit explanations concerning pasta cooking time, the benefits of *pasta al dente* etc. As a follow-up to the discussion, students were invited to write the recipe of *spaghetti al pomodoro*, and the recipe of one of their popular dishes. This reflective piece of writing not only allowed learners to expand their *knowing why* in terms of Italian cooking ingredients, procedures etc., but also offered them the opportunity to provide responses to knowing themselves.

Thus, the study further helped me reflect on how the culturally responsive teacher's task is to set functional language learning objectives (e.g. expressing, inquiring about, evaluating, interpreting, relating,

describing, giving and responding to feedback) to process cultural content (cfr. Porto, 2000). In this way, learners can be guided through the cyclical process of generating new *responses* to knowing oneself, engaging in *participation* in knowing how and in *description* of knowing about, providing *interpretation* of knowing why so as to expand and systematise their repertoires of cultural knowings.

6. Conclusions

While the importance of language courses directed to mobility students is widely acknowledged, the value of focussing on cultural knowings during these courses is underestimated. The present study has shown the potential of diagnosing cultural knowings in the mobility language learning classroom. Since survey findings are small-scaled, they can by no means be generalised. Nevertheless, they show that learners need to be encouraged to reflect upon themselves and their own culture in order to help them change as individuals. In the present case, working with a popular song from the target language and culture stimulated learners' competence of *knowledge discovery* at the INCA intermediate level. Their sample task production showed, in fact, their motivation and curiosity to develop their knowledge of their own culture as perceived by others. More than merely learning a linguistic code, future mobility students should be enabled to engage in reflective learning processes in which they are weaned away from their subjective interpretations and unconscious stereotyped constructions of other cultures.

As Beacco & Byram (2003: 34) point out:

the acquisition of a plurilingual repertoire throughout life is thus associated with the development of an awareness of the cultural complexity of the environment, particularly evident in and among European countries. This awareness can also be associated with changes in cultural competence and identification.

Intensive in-house training experiences can contribute to this process by endeavouring to uproot learners' unconscious culturally-shaped responses. Mobility language teachers can contribute to avoid disrupting learners' individual world view, self-identity, and systems of thinking,

acting and communicating when changing from one culture to another even if they have a short span of time available. By encouraging mobility students to focus on their cultural knowings, language teachers guide them to develop abilities such as *reflecting and introspecting culturally, constructing intercultural knowing as social action, connecting the intracultural with the intercultural, assuming responsibility based on intercultural attitudes, and interacting and communicating interculturally* which contribute to strengthening their intercultural competence.

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