Perspectives of Intercultural Communication in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Perspectivas de la comunicación intercultural en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras

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Abstract:

This article focuses on the intercultural approaches to teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Spain. Within communication and linguistic uses, we relate the concepts of communicative competence (Byram, 1997) to an intercultural speaker (Kramsch, 1998) with both learning and teaching at our technological educational context. These concepts will be approached from an intercultural perspective. In order to help future speakers of a language overcome above appointed issues, the idea is to set the theoretical foundation which helps us to elaborate an Academic Program bearing in mind how interculturality leads to different uses of grammar in L1 and L2. The main results will lead to adjusting EFL to current legislation, raise awareness on how interculturality is a really strong tool to understand grammar and on current limitations and further research to be done on this subject.

Resumen:

Este artículo se centra en los enfoques interculturales en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en España. En el marco de la comunicación y los usos lingüísticos, relacionamos los conceptos de competencia comunicativa (Byram, 1997) con el de hablante intercultural (Kramsch, 1998) y ambos a su vez con la enseñanza y aprendizaje con el contexto educativo y tecnológico. Estos conceptos se analizarán desde una perspectiva intercultural. Con la intención de ayudar a futuros hablantes a superar tales dificultades, la idea es establecer una base teórica que nos ayudará a elaborar una programación didáctica que tenga en cuenta como la interculturalidad lleva a diferentes usos de la gramática en las L1 y L2. Los resultados principales nos llevarán a un ajuste del EFL a la legislación vigente, a la concienciación de cómo la interculturalidad es una herramienta muy potente para entender las reglas gramaticales de una cultura meta, y un análisis de las limitaciones y de futuras investigaciones a realizar en este ámbito.

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1. Global Setting in Local Contexts

In case we had to explain how and what the world currently looks like, fast-paced changes shorten distances between countries and the high speed of information flow would be some helpful ways to describe it. Despite these big movements, we are far from having a single universal culture. Technology plays a great role in this type of educational context as well. In this globalized society, we see different cultures in contact ubiquitously: in the way we dress, in what we read in the newspapers or on the internet, in what we eat, and in the music we hear.

Globalization and higher migration in Western countries have increased the number of contacts between and across cultures. Not only has this entailed the emergence of the complex and broad concept of interculturality, but nevertheless a revolution in foreign language teaching and the use of technology in these contexts. It is not only about learning other languages; but about understanding the culture underneath, since "there is no language without culture" (Springer, 2005, p. 2).

While learning a new language, it is paramount to know and understand the L2/L3 culture. With the arrival of globalization, culture has become a key element nowadays, especially while learning a vehicular language such as English: two non-native English speakers can use the exact same word to refer to a concept and not achieve a proper communication of meaning. As Springer explains words can have several meanings in the same cultural context (Springer, 2005). If two speakers from different cultures are both using this same word, failure to communicate correctly is more highly to have a place. Moving forward in this direction, because of recent decades' socioeconomic, technological, and scientific development, communications, and linguistic uses are undergoing a quiet, but far-reaching revolution. In this evolution, language contact and multilingualism leave the world with a sense of belonging and of being the exclusive property of executives, tourists, or border areas and bilingual communities, for the purpose of becoming a generalized reality (Cassany, 1996, p. 62).

To sum up, language adapts to new communicative needs generating a great diversity of forms that demand from the user a wider and deeper knowledge of the cultures and contexts where the language is used (Cassany, 1996). Therefore, English, as well as any Foreign Language, cannot be taught separately from its culture. It is of utmost importance that the link between L1 and L2/L3 cultures is kept during the learning and teaching processes to an L2. Even grammar or syntax should be taught always keeping in mind the similarities and differences between the two languages. By explaining these aspects of language in this way, we help students become closer to the language and culture of L2, thanks to a better understanding of the reason behind the structure of an L2/L3 language, and therefore, its mentality.

In this article, we will develop the state of the art, focusing on the key concepts of interculturality, communicative approach, and linguistic mediation, among others. We will then proceed with presenting a critical assessment of the main ideas presented, as well as the limitations experienced, conclusions, and future research that can be developed from this project.

2. Intercultural Communication, Mediation, and Sensitivity

It is very common that a language to be approached by students by focusing on grammar, syntax, and memorizing vocabulary. However, the more proficient a student gets in a language, the better he or she can understand the mentality of the native speakers. In parallel to achieving a better un-

derstanding of L2/L3 way of thinking, a student will also see the logic behind using certain verbal tenses or expressions in a context, or the reasons behind grammar rules (Spychała, 2014). Therefore, this shows that culture is completely indissoluble from Language and that understanding the L2/L3 culture is helpful while studying grammar.

The teacher will play not only the role of an educator but also a linguistic mediator among L1 and L2/L3 cultures (Medina, 2018). The idea would be to work on highlighting the similarities, to ensure that the learner feels closer to this new culture and is more aware of their own one (Cassany, 1996). This will enhance both intercultural communication and sensibility and will therefore make it easier to beat stereotypes and misconceptions about other cultures. Students will understand the importance of courtesy and manners, especially when it comes to communicating with different cultures. Considering this, our main objective will be to learn how to effectively communicate, no matter what context the learner is in: if standard language is kept, and courtesy is respected, the message among cultures should pass without major issues. Therefore, as specific objectives, we could enumerate the following ones:

- To define goals and approaches of EFL education in terms of Language and cultural learning Intercultural competence acquisition; and
- To raise awareness on how grammar reflects cultural lying underneath a language.
- To set the theoretical foundation on Intercultural Communicative Competence to meet goals established in both Real Decreto 217/2022 and Real Decreto 243/2022.

3. State of the Art: Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Interculturality is a type of relationship established among cultures that enhances the dialogue and encounter from the mutual acknowledgment of values and ways of living. The idea is not to create a single culture but to strengthen each of them and enrich creatively and mutually them. This concept also refers to the relationships between people from different ethnic, social, professional, and gender groups, within the borders of the same community. It is important to consider the level of technology expertise, too (Centro Virtual Cervantes, *Diccionario de términos clave de ELE*).

While discussing Interculturality in Foreign Language Teaching, we will focus on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Before delving into this concept, it is necessary to discuss what we team by competence, which is opposed to 'performance'. Competence is an idealized conception of language that refers to the "speakers' knowledge of their language, the system of rules which they have mastered so that they are able to produce and understand a number of sentences, and to recognize grammatical mistakes and ambiguities" (Crystal, 2006, p. 92).

To gain a better understanding of ICC, it is important to start by talking about Noam Chomsky, who first introduced the concept of linguistic competence as the principal aim to be achieved by a speaker (Segade, 2016, p. 36). Based on this concept, Dell Hymes developed the idea of communicative competence, where he combines linguistics and ethnography, concluding that communicative competence is the ability not only to correctly use grammar rules to create grammatically correct sentences, but also to know when, and where a with who use those sentences,

this is, the speaker is expected to use the language both accurately and appropriately depending on the context.

When it comes to finding a definition of ICC, we can enumerate a large number of studies dealing with this. Given its vast and complex nature, Griffith et al. (2016) found:

> the current state of the literature to be murky in terms of the clarity of the Intercultural Communicative Competence construct. Definitions of the construct vary considerably as to whether it is a trait, skill, or performance outcome. In addition, current measurements of ICC overly rely on self-report methods, which have a number of flaws that result in less than optimal assessment (p. 1).

Even though this concept was initially introduced by Herbert Baxter in 1983, Michael Byram was the author who developed this idea in depth (Segade, C. et al., 2016, p. 190). To explain it, he first splits communicative competence into six dimensions, which are: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, sociocultural competence, and social competence (Byram, M., p. 10). In order to further explain the concept of ICC Byram proposes a schema compounded by several *savoirs* that will be the foundation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in 2001. These are *savoirs* or knowledge of self and other, of interaction, individual societal; *savoir comprendre* or the skills to interpret and relate; *savoir s'engager* or critical cultural awareness; *savoir apprendre/faire* or the skills to discover and/or interact; and finally, *savoir être* or the attitudes to play oneself down and valuing others. (Segade, C. et al., 2016, p. 192-193). As explained by Carlos Medina in his research project (Medina, 2018, p. 38) following this first approach given by Byram, Fatini et al. presented a breakdown of intercultural communicative competence into 3 main abilities, which are:

- To develop and maintain relationships
- To communicate effectively and appropriately with minimal loss or distortion
- To attain compliance and obtain cooperation with others.

Therefore, intercultural communicative competence is, in the end, the general ability to negotiate cultural meanings and execute effective communicative behaviors (Vilà Baños, p. 354). As stated by Vilà Baños:

> Esta eficacia se basa en el grado de comprensión aceptable para las personas interlocutoras; el resultado obtenido no se define en términos de perfección, sino de suficiencia, aceptando siempre un cierto grado de incertidumbre entre los seres humanos (Vilà Baños, p. 354).

Within this efficacy context or situations play a major role in these interchanges: it can happen that these behaviors can be acceptable or not, depending on the context or situation where they take place. In this way, pragmatic failure appears when the speaker's utterance is not recognized by the speaker, but also when there is an "inability on the part of H[earer] to understand the in-

tended sense/reference of the speaker's words in the context in which they are uttered" (Thomas, 1983, p. 94 in Buján Sánchez, 2016, p. 8). By context, we do not only refer to culture but also all the elements that compound that communicative encounter, this is relationships between speakers (friends, co-workers, relatives, strangers, etc.) and the reason for the communication (Vilà Baños, p. 354).

Griffith et al. (2016) made a great effort to gather the existing models that study the current conceptualizations of ICC and to propose a new framework that suggests that these models could fall into five categories, which are:

- Compositional models (e.g., Deardorff, 2006; W. D. Hunter, White, & Godbey, 2006; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) merely describe the characteristics (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) of ICC.

- Co-orientational models (e.g., Fantini, 1995; Kupka, 2008; Rathje, 2007) tend to describe the components or process of a successful intercultural interaction.

- Developmental models describe ICC in terms of individual development over time (e.g., Bennett, 1986; P. M. King & Baxter Magolda, 2005).

- Adaptational models (e.g., J. W. Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989; Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles, & Coupland, 1988) combine the developmental components of the models and present them in an interactional context of adapting to a foreign culture.

- Causal path models (e.g., Arasaratnam, 2008; Deardorff, 2006; D. A. Griffith & Harvey, 2000; Hammer, Wiseman, Rasmussen, & Bruschke, 1998) attempt to integrate the characteristics of compositional models and situate them in an interaction in which variables influence each other to predict ICC (p. 2).

ICC is the key element of the learning process in a technological context. To ensure that this concept is clearly explained Table 1 has been elaborated. This table presents chronologically a summary of the main contributions to the delimitation of ICC. Starting with Michael Byram, who first studied this concept Griffith et al., who in 2016 worked on organizing all the existing definitions of ICC into five big models:

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Table1. *Main contributions to ICC*

Source	Description
Byram, 1997, p. 10	There are saviors or knowledge of self and other, which are; *savoir comprendre* *savoir s'engager* *savoir apprendre/faire* *savoir être*
Fantini et al., 2001, p. 27	1) The ability to develop and maintain relationships, 2) The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with minimal loss or distortion, and 3) The ability to attain compliance and obtain cooperation with others
Vilà Baños, 2006, p. 354	La competencia comunicativa intercultural responde a la habilidad general de negociar significados culturales y ejecutar conductas comunicativas eficaces
Griffith et al., 2016, p. 2	Five models of ICC: - Compositional models - Co-orientational models - Developmental - Adaptational models - Causal path models

Source: own elaboration

As L2/L3 teachers, we are aiming not only to make our students proficient in their L2/L3 language but also to help them to become what Michael Byram (1997) and Claire Kramsch (1998) have called the intercultural speaker. This term is one of the key points considered while developing the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (2001) or CEFR from now onwards. In this document, the intercultural speaker is defined as one who possesses:

• intercultural communicative competence as a complex entity of intercultural relations (*savoir être*)
• knowledge of social groups and practices in both the target and home cultures (*savoirs*)
• skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*)
• skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*)
• critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*), which comprises abilities to evaluate perspectives, practices, and products of both home and target cultures (Byram, 1997 cited in Commission, 2012, p. 5).

The CEFR is a document of high importance not only as a tool to promote critical thinking about language teaching, but also to recognize the intercultural and plurilingual competences, which go beyond multilingualism. CEFR was also the basis to elaborate other documents such as the Intercultural competence curriculum framework (2012), where multilingualism is the core idea of an approach focused on the relations between languages and cultures. Intercultural education, therefore, aims to eliminate the artificial boundaries between languages and to promote comprehensive use of

the linguistic, reflective, and intercultural repertoire that the student acquires throughout his or her linguistic experiences within or outside the classroom. In this sense, the intercultural learner "aprovechará las experiencias propias para desarrollar estrategias que permitan mediar y hacer transferencias entre lenguas [...] y, en su caso, mantener y adquirir destrezas en la lengua [...]" (Real Decreto 217/2022, p. 27). Medina talking about Fantini, also mentions the characteristics of the intercultural speaker, which are among others: "la empatía, la apertura hacia los demás, la flexibilidad, el humor, la paciencia, el interés la curiosidad, la tolerancia a la ambigüedad, o tener cuidado al enjuiciar" (Fantini, 2012, p. 271 in Medina, 2018, p. 37).

Approaching language teaching from an intercultural perspective is therefore a reality, as shown not only by the European Commission but also by the laws in the different countries in Europe. In this sense, should we still speak about teachers? The role of the teacher itself seems to be evolving from a person that explains concepts (in our area of grammar, syntax, or vocabulary, among others) to a person that needs to master cultures from both L1 and L2/L3, in order to make sure that speakers have intercultural awareness while acquiring a new language. Thanks to the intercultural dialogue that he or she will be leading in the classroom, the students will be able to recognize the person from another culture at the same level, reinforce their own identity while recognizing others, accept social and cultural diversity as well as to respect the fundamental rights (Decreto de Galicia 133/2007, p. 26193). The teacher will be acting more like an intercultural mediator, who will be acting as a bridge between two different cultures to bring them together, fade away the tensions and attain real communication between both ends.

In order to duly understand what courtesy is about, we would first need to talk about the philosopher Grice (1975), who formulated general conversational behavior in terms of the Cooperative Principle. This principle is divided into four principles that people follow when communicating with each other. These principles are aiming to enable and attain effective communication. They are usually called the Gricean Maxims, which are:

- Maxims of Quantity: make your contribution as informative as required.
- Maxims of Quality: be truthful. Do not say things that you believe to be false or you lack adequate evidence for.
- Maxims of Relation: be relevant. Say things that are pertinent to the discussion.

Maxims of Manner: be perspicuous. Avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity; be brief and avoid unnecessary prolixity and be orderly (Buckingham, 2015, p. 59).

The Maxim of Manner, which is the starting point for understanding courtesy and politeness, was developed in depth by Geoffrey Leech. Even if he made clear that these vary from culture to culture, this linguist developed six maxims or politeness principles, based on 3 scales to measure courtesy in speech acts, which are (Nikleva, 2010, p. 68):

- Cost-benefit: there is a proportional relation between these two. The more cost there is to the listener, the more impolite the action; the bigger the benefit can obtain for the listener, the more polite the action is.

- Direction: politeness justifies the use of indirect forms, which are usually more polite because they do suggest to the listener a possibility to proceed or not with the requested act.
- Options: a polite offers different options to the speaker, although they do not have to always be uttered with interrogative forms, as they can also be impolite (they can be ironic, sarcastic, etc.).

By using this scale, Leech has established that there are 6 politeness principles (Leech, 1983, p. 250), which are: the tact maxim (*Could I interrupt you for a second? Won't you sit down?*), the generosity maxim (*You must come and dinner with us* (polite); *We must come and have dinner with you* (impolite)), approbation maxim or Flattery Maxim (*I heard you singing at the karaoke last night. It sounded like you were enjoying yourself!*), the modesty maxim (*Please accept this small gift as a token of our steem* (polite); *Please accept this large gift as a token of our steem* (impolite), the agreement maxim (*A: The book is tremendously well written. B: Yes, well written as a whole, but there are some rather boring patches, don't you think?* (polite), the sympathy maxim (*I am terribly sorry to hear your cat died* (polite)); *I am terribly pleased to hear that your cat died* (impolite).

If we consider both Grice and Leech principles, we would get to the conclusion that courtesy is "un fenómeno sociopragmático que se produce en un determinado contexto sociocultural, cuyos componentes garantizan la presencia o ausencia de adecuación en los actos de habla." (Nikleva, 2010, p. 65). Therefore, it is not only important to learn the dynamics of a language, but also its sociocultural context, so we can effectively communicate something that without courtesy and politeness is unlikely to occur.

In order to develop an academic program we will make sure that it is fulfilling the four major ideas Krajcik and Blumenfeld in 2006, which are (Bonal, 2016, p. 98):

- Active construction. Students will be encouraged to actively research, observe, interact, and discuss with other team members or even people not directly involved in their projects.
- Situated learning. While building up this knowledge, they will be in contact with both English Language and its culture: they will take part in real-world activities.
- Social interaction will be basic to duly develop their project, as it is intended for an audience, they will be targeting themselves.
- Cognitive tools. The academic program will be using a platform that will help students to organize the information they gather, create virtual group discussions, or even create documents that could be useful for the presentations.

The teacher will not only give linguistic support to students but in the end, also work as an intercultural mediator. Students will also need to think of themselves as mediators between cultures to effectively build their knowledge on the L2/L3.

The intercultural mediator will be the bridge between two different cultures, both starting and ending points. The mediator has a perfect command of both cultures and his work would be to construct a route in a correct, careful and wise way in order to ensure that the objectives are achieved,

brought together, connect, diffused tensions, and reach real and effective communication between both parties.

4. Communication and Learning a Foreign Language

Language and communication are two bound concepts. One cannot be understood without the other one. Within the communication and linguistic uses, our main objective while teaching and learning a language will be to achieve a command over communicative competence. This competence is compounded by several elements such as "Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing oneself. Linguistic competence plays a key role" (Byram, 1997, p. 34).

There are several ingredients that we can consider while working towards achieving communicative competence, such as audience, discourse, context, society, identity, empathy, pragmatics, and, of course, culture. As we mentioned above, globalization is creating more and more links between different cultures. Even if interculturality is a broad concept, we could bring into play Spychała's approach who explains that this term "is used to designate both action and communication: communication between individuals, between groups, and between institutions belonging to different cultures or coming from different cultures that do not normally relate to each other." This idea differs from the concept of multicultural which refers to the presence in a society of two or more cultures (Spychała, 2014, p. 88).

Once the difference between these is clear, we can approach one of our main goals of intercultural communication, which is defined by Arent as "the sending and receiving of messages across languages and cultures. It is also a negotiated understanding of meaning in human experiences across social systems and societies" (Arent, 2009, p. 2).

While sending these messages intercultural traits, attitudes, worldviews, and capabilities will play a relevant role. While talking about intercultural traits Griffith et al. refer to "stable personality traits that drive likely behavior, and they commonly include openness to experience and tolerance for ambiguity (p. 2)." They also give define the term intercultural attitudes and worldviews as "constructs involving the perception and evaluation of information from outside an individual's own culture" (p. 2) Last but not least, the term intercultural capabilities refer to anything that a person can do, think, or know that will allow him or her to interact successfully in an intercultural situation (Griffith et al., 2016, p. 2).

Within intercultural communication, we should also consider both intercultural sensitivity and maturity. Intercultural sensitivity is "the way people construe cultural difference and […] the varying kinds of experience that accompany these constructions" (Bennett, 1993, p. 24) This author has also concluded that there are six stages the development of intercultural sensitivity goes through denial, defense/reversal, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration.

All these elements are in close contact with both the affective dimension of communication and pragmatic competence. The affective dimension refers to "aquellas capacidades de emitir respuestas emocionales positivas y controlar aquellas emociones que pueden perjudicar el proceso comu-

nicativo intercultural" (Vilà, 2003b, p. 355). In this process, the speaker should also master his or her pragmatic competence, which refers to "the ability of the users of a language to understand and use language accurately and appropriately in context" (Buján Sánchez, 2016). In this research, we will focus on the pragmatics of politeness and courtesy, by studying the different uses of time tenses in both L1 and L2/L3 languages, among other topics.

Acquiring ICC in an L2/L3 would need at some point teaching and learning. In this sense, Spychała defines several approaches within cultural learning and teaching, which are: the foreign language approach, intercultural approach, multicultural approach, and transcultural approach. We will be of course focusing on the intercultural approach, which accepts cultural connections between L2/L3 and L1 countries. Interaction is seen as the comparison between two cultures, emphasizing the need of knowing, understanding, and recognizing each other. On the other hand, the foreign language approach only focuses on L2/L3 culture, avoiding any link with the learner's native culture. The multicultural approach analyzes the encounter of different cultures existing in the L2/L3 country. The transcultural approach is used when communication among different cultures is done through a *lingua franca* that none of the speakers is native to (Spychała, 2014).

By working to achieve intercultural competence, empathy will be activated to make sure that L2/L3 learners become active listeners and effective speakers. According to Arent (2009, p.8), an active listener:

• stay focused on the speaker's main points
• tunes out all potential distractions
• offers the fullest possible attention
• gives signals that he or she is listening as objectively as possible
• is flexible and open-minded when new topics or ideas are raised
• ask for clarification if anything is unclear
• validates the speaker's main points (Arent, 2009, p. 8).

Arent also refers to an effective speaker as one whose use of speech is accurate and fluent but also matches their speech to their specific audience and the purpose of communication (Arent, 2009, p. 11).

As aforesaid, we will be working through the intercultural approach in learning grammar rules (correct use of verbal tenses, especially imperative forms), courtesy and politeness, offensiveness, and idioms. The idea is always to approach the L2/L3 culture in a positive way, seeking similarities between both, which will strengthen the above differences. To understand these, we will work on understanding the reason behind why L2/L3 varies, by actively listening and working with empathy to overcome L1 ethnocentrism and make cultural relativism more visible to the L2/L3 learner.

5. Critical Assessment

While investigating interculturality and education, we found that there were a lot of research studies that focused on schools where there are several cultures living together. There are several areas in Spain, especially big cities, where intercultural encounters are more common. We should point out

that this scenario is not applicable to all regions and areas. In this sense, there are huge differences between regions in Spain, meaning that described contexts are not always applicable to those areas, meaning that scenarios like the one studied by Vilà Baños can give hints on how other areas view interculturality, but it is not really applicable to other realities such Galician or Castillian, among others, as its society is not as heterogeneous as the Catalan one, described by Baños.

Moreover, in regions where interculturality interchanges do not naturally take place, interculturality means bringing the L2/L3 culture into the classroom, as the society is very homogeneous from a demographic and cultural point of view. Making sure that L2/L3 culture is part of the classroom becomes also more complicated, as there are fewer real-life resources to be used. In other Spanish big cities for instance, it would be easier to bring a native speaker into the classroom that could introduce some topic to them.

The idea throughout this study is to bring awareness that both cultures have connections in global and technological contexts by identifying common elements. For instance, by approaching literal translations in a positive way through intercultural sensitivity, we attain two targets simultaneously: learning and understanding grammar rules and learning more about both L1 and L2/L3 cultures.

In 2019 and for the first time in Spain, intercultural communication and mediation were assessed in the Official Language Schools (*Escuela Oficial de Idiomas,* EOI), something that was (and still is!) a real challenge for teachers, as indicated by Calatayud in the outcome of the roundtable on how to implement linguistic mediation in the classroom (Calatayud, 2018). Moreover, the new conception of the teacher as a cultural mediator in the classroom challenges current FLT training, as shown during the last EOI Congress that was held in Santiago in 2022, as mediation tasks and challenges were one of the core subjects of the workshops and conferences.

Article 20 of the Real Decreto 217/2022, from the 26th of March, explains the tools to make sure that students with special needs receive the help and training they need. More precisely, in this article we can read:

> Las Administraciones educativas fomentarán la calidad, equidad e inclusión educativa de las personas con discapacidad, la igualdad de oportunidades y no discriminación por razón de discapacidad, medidas de flexibilización y alternativas metodológicas, adaptaciones curriculares, accesibilidad universal, diseño universal, atención a la diversidad y todas aquellas medidas que sean necesarias para conseguir que el alumnado con discapacidad pueda acceder a una educación de calidad en igualdad de oportunidades. […] Con este propósito, las administraciones educativas establecerán los procedimientos oportunos para realizar adaptaciones de los elementos del currículo […] (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2022, p.15).

In order to challenge this, there are several actions that can be applied, such as working in spaces that are accessible, educating in values and respecting differences, stimulating student's effort and enhancing the ability to learn individually and with peers; facilitating interaction while creating working groups; allocating tasks, contents, and objectives by adapting them to the student special

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features; adapting evaluation criteria for each group of students; creating specific materials and didactic resources to cover student's special needs; planning the academic program bearing into account integration, pacific coexistence, direct participation, open communication in order to make sure that experiences and ideas are exchanged between students and teachers.

Intercultural competence is not only a tool to bring L1 and L2/L3 together. It is also a way to overcome stereotypes, to become more tolerant, more open-minded, and more respectful of any human being, no matter what his background is, no matter how different it is. By combining interculturality with a project-based learning approach, the classroom becomes more inclusive and even if the students are working together, it is easier to give each student the individual assistance they need.

6. Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

Learning language through interculturality may seem a very challenging task. However, in the end, mastering a language is directly linked to diving into its culture. It is true that we can know a lot of vocabulary and have a perfect knowledge of grammar. However, it will still sound not natural to a native speaker of the target language we are learning if there are cultural references that are unknown or if the verb tenses are used equally in L1 and L2/L3.

For instance, when we were studying foreign languages, we were never thought about the different uses the same verb tense has in each language. Even between our mother tongue's languages the verb tenses are used differently, something that is especially noteworthy between two very close languages (in our case Spanish, Catalan, and Galician). We would say that the biggest difference we experienced while living in an English-speaking country was the big difference in using imperative tenses in Spanish/Galician/Catalan and English, a mistranslation that can lead to communication failures. In future research, we suggest that these differences in verb tenses used between English and Spanish speakers are studied, as it will also be a hint while using English as *lingua franca*. If we are aware of the similarities and differences between our L1 and L2/L3, it will be easier to spot intercultural gaps while speaking with other non-native English speakers. An example would be for example non-native English speakers coming from countries with Slavic languages: most of them do not use articles because they simply do not have them in their native languages.

Interculturality helps to better understand one's own culture, to be open to other cultures, to understand the logic of a language, to overcome stereotypes, and to build respect within the classroom, towards students with special needs. It is becoming so important that in 2018 it has been established by law that linguistic mediation should be assessed in the Official Language Schools. Moreover, in 2022 legislation on Secondary Education includes interculturality not only within the key competencies but also as one of the main blocks in which FL is divided.

In this sense, using strategies to approach both L1 and L2/L3 cultures will mean that the role of the teacher will change from an expert in a language to a mediator between two different cultures. He or she has to have a perfect command of both languages and a profound knowledge of both cultures, in order to build bridges, overcome tensions and achieve real communication between both parties. If an L2/L3 teacher should have this from now onwards this role therefore its training should be

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reconsidered. In addition, something that may also require further research here is how we can train teachers to become linguistic mediators themselves and educate other future linguistic mediators

Moreover, it is important to keep in mind how intercultural and linguistic learning processes are linked to global and technological processes. It is necessary to keep them in consideration and thus be able to work in these *glocal* learning contexts. For that reason, mixing interculturality and project-based learning is a challenging but interesting combination to address Foreign Language Teaching. It will require extra effort from both teachers and students, and without motivation, this approach will not work at all.

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