# 'I don't fit this intercultural profile. I am kind of different.' Critical Reflection on the Possible Effect of Cultural Attribution Bias in Intercultural Competence Assessment Materials Design

Barbara Muszyńska[1] (iD)
Stephan-Alexander Ditze[2] (iD)

## Abstract

This article aims to report data from the implementation of intercultural competence assessment activities conducted in a secondary school in Germany. The study involved qualitative content analysis and critical reflection as a method of inquiry. The findings show that the design of the intercultural profile task in the Assessor Manual used in the study reflects Cultural Attribution Bias (CAB) which may contribute to false end results when working with young people from diverse backgrounds. Such materials may implicitly and unwittingly support bias and, what is more, socialize learners into accepting it. Bearing that in mind, the teachers' ability to think and reflect critically on the effectiveness of different assessment activities and tools used with students is crucial in organizing the education process and for the well-being of the students.

[1] DSW University of Lower Silesia, Poland, barbara.muszynska@dsw.edu.pl, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0137-363X

[2] Max-Planck-Gymnasium Delmenhorst, stephan-alexander.ditze@maxe-del.de, University of Bremen, ditze@uni-bremen.de, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8095-6595

## Introduction

This article aims to report data from original research  that was conducted during the implementation stage post Erasmus+ "Teacher Culture Pluri" (TEACUP) 1-ES01-KA203-06441 project[1], which produced six educational modules that aim at generating synergies in the teaching of various languages and cultures by integrating the notions of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism into international training programs for foreign language teachers. This Erasmus+ project's goal was to promote high-quality, evidence-based, sustainable solutions for integrating the plurilingual/pluricultural approach into international foreign language education (Muszyńska & Gómez-Parra, 2021).

There is general agreement in the field as to the difficulty of assessing intercultural competence (Conway & Richards, 2018; Holmes & O'Neil, 2012), especially in the areas of attitudes (curiosity and openness) and awareness (Fantini, 2009, p. 459). Hence, the aim of the implementation of project outcomes was to observe how in-service teachers approach intercultural competence assessment and to implement various assessment types (Hansen-Thomas et al., forthcoming) that could contribute to the above in the areas of knowledge, attitudes and skills (CEFR, 2018) and promote self-reflection and awareness (Byram, 2008).

This article reports data from one of the activities done in the original research described above that involved the implementation of the notions of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism by foreign language teachers internationally. The activity described in this article refers to intercultural competence assessment. It involved developing learners' own intercultural profiles based on the Assessor Manual available online and  the assessment of students' intercultural competence. The implementation phase took place with one group of students in a secondary school in Germany from April to June 2023 and ended with a reflective writing task for the students. The final task made us realize that we may have come to false conclusions, had the students been assessed only on the basis of the intercultural profile developed while working with the questionnaire in the Assessor Manual.  Having analyzed students' work and the IC assessment materials, we conclude that the reductionist view of culture used in the Assessor Manual as an explanatory panacea to account for behavior patterns in people, made it arduous for students to create their intercultural profiles and reflect on them.  The cultural attribution bias, which is based on monocausal

---

[1] https://teacup-project.eu/site/

explanations for human behavior,  may implicitly support one-sidedness and, what is more, socialize students into accepting it. In this situation, the teacher's ability to think and reflect critically on the effectiveness of different assessment activities and tools used with students is crucial in organizing the education process and for the well-being of the students.

## Theoretical background

### Intercultural competence assessment

One of the Modules developed in the Erasmus+ "Teacher Culture Pluri" (TEA-CUP), Module MC3 Culture Learner Assessment,[2] refers to pluricultural education and was used in the original study. Hence the focus on intercultural competence assessment in this article.

Intercultural competence can be measured in a number of ways. Some of the online tools that can be used are designed for teams or individuals, e.g. the Intercultural Readiness Check[3], the Cultural Intelligence Scale[4], or the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory[5], to name a few. The latter is most similar to the tool used in the activities described in this article, the Intercultural Competence Assessment tool, which can be used by a team or by individuals. The Assessor Manual[6] used in this study, aims to provide guidance to an assessor who will be assessing intercultural competence against the framework developed by its authors.

There are many definitions of intercultural competence (IC) (e.g., Stern, 1983; Koester and Olebe, 1989; Lambert, 1994; Byram, 1997; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 2000). The Assessor Manual, mentioned above, is designed in line with the theories of Byram (1997), Kuhlmann (1996), Müller-Jacquier (2000) and Budin (mentioned in the body of the text but not in the References of the Manual) Framework for Intercultural Competence Learning. The authors of the Assessor

---

[2] https://teacup-project.eu/site/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/MC3-RV3.pdf

[3] https://www.ibinet.online/competence-assessment2 - available in six languages

[4] www.culturalq.com

[5] https://thebevi.com

[6] https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/sites/default/files/2009-08/docl_9372_394918047.pdf. More can be found here: https://www.digi-pass.eu/how-to-measure-intercultural-competence

Manual, at the time of its design, were based in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany and the United Kingdom. As the document asserts, they are experts in intercultural learning theory, designing training and assessment, and diagnostic testing/assessment testing. The Assessor Manual explains that "[i]ntercultural competence enables you to interact both effectively and in a way that is acceptable to others when you are working in a group whose members have different cultural backgrounds. The group may consist of two or more people, including yourself. 'Cultural' may denote all manner of features, including the values and beliefs you have grown up with, your national, regional and local customs and, in particular, attitudes and practices that affect the way you work" (p. 5). The Assessor Manual further presents the features of intercultural competence in detail. It suggests that feedback should be given by the Assessor to each participant in a special meeting and/or in writing, summarizing the results (p. 16). In our project with secondary school learners, we decided to add a reflective essay as a reflection tool for students on the intercultural profile work instead of having the teacher provide feedback to the students.

## Intercultural Profile

The authors of the intercultural profile (IP) presented in the Assessor Manual assert that it helps to measure an individual's intercultural competence. It can be an activity on its own or serve as an input for other class activities, which serves to increase the individual's awareness of their cultural orientation and competence. Usually, intercultural profile activities include a questionnaire and provide instant feedback for participants. The questions/statements contain all of the dimensions of intercultural competence in view of the literature used and are to help the Assessee reflect on their intercultural experiences to date. Such forms of evaluation claim to contribute to the development of cultural awareness, knowledge and skills for cross-cultural management in individuals. The IP questionnaires available online usually assert that the accuracy of findings depends on truthful and accurate answers. The one used in the activities presented in this article contains 21 statements on intercultural situations. The assessee crosses off answers depending on whether the statements are applicable or not.

## Cultural attribution bias

As in most trades, members of the teaching profession and laborers in the vineyard of foreign language pedagogy tend to see the world filtered through the eyes of their profession. This conditioned vision is bound to lead to a reduction of complexity

and thus to an incomplete, distorted or plainly wrong view of reality. Researchers and practitioners, for instance, who occupy themselves with the cultural parameters of language learning seem susceptible to regarding individuals predominantly as representatives of a certain cultural community. Instead of looking at the person and its idiosyncrasies, humans are at risk of being reduced to what is believed to be their cultural persona. We would like to propose the term "Cultural Attribution Bias (CAB)" in order to capture this (mis-) guided or at least unduly reductionistic perspectivity.

The term CAB is value-free, allows for a systematic description of cultural phenomena and facilitates the rendition of culture by an easily handleable approach that, however, is not reductionist.

The functioning of the CAB as a specific type of cognitive bias can best be explained by recurring to the notion of culture used in the field of cultural semiotics. Unlike the rather ephemeral concept of 'culture' that forms the basis of EU frameworks of reference, cultural semioticians see culture as a tripartite structure. The first element of this structure, termed 'civilization' (Posner 1991, p. 37, p. 44), is its material culture, comprising all artifacts a community has brought forth as well as the skills of their reproduction. Literature and arts, the media, music, theater, architecture, and interior design, scientific achievements, technological innovation, fashion, and clothing and above all, language can be cited as prominent manifestations of a community's material culture. Another element is its social culture (Posner 1991, p. 37) comprising a community's social structure, social relations, social climate, socio-economic and the socio-political conditions of the culture depicted, as well as its legal system, education system, customs, traditions, and the rituals performed by its group members. The third element captures what may be called the 'mentality' or mental side of culture (Posner 1991, p. 38), such as the ideas and values a culture has brought forth and the conventions of their presentation and use (ibid.). Mentefacts form the building blocks of mental culture, guiding, to a greater or lesser extent, the behavior of the members of a group, such as the ethics/morality, dominating ideology/ideologies and religion/religions of a community. It stands to reason that an individual's socialization goes hand in hand with its enculturation, i.e. their adoption of elements that stem from the material, social and mental culture(s) they have been and are predominantly exposed to. The cultural attribution bias (CAB) seems to be caused by the tacit assumption that an individual's process of enculturation is so formative that a person's cultural background accounts

for virtually all of its attitudes and behavior patterns. This results in a proneness to ascribe cultural typicality to character traits that might well be idiosyncratic.

## Context

### Participants

The group of students where the mentioned activities were implemented consisted of 21 students (twelve girls and nine boys), 15 to 17-year-olds. There was one Aramaen student in class, a Christian minority in Turkey, one of Kurdish-Syrian background, one student from Montenegro and an American girl whose family recently moved to Germany. In addition, a number of students come from Polish families and have grown up bilingually.

The activities were implemented with the group in a bilingual (German-English) politics/economics course.

All participants in the study have provided appropriate informed consent forms. As all of the students were minors at the time of the project implementation, their parents/guardians had to state their explicit consent by signature, which all of them did without exception. The student with a Kurdish-Syrian background, Ahmad, whose work is presented in this article in full, was informed verbally about the ethical considerations of the study, voluntary participation, aim and purpose of the study, and him and his mother have given additional consent in writing to display Ahmad's work and his real first name to appear in this article, since this was what he wanted.

### Task

The course teacher, author 2, created instructions and a questionnaire for the intercultural profile task based on the online IP questionnaire in the Assessor Manual. Questions 1 to 15 (pp. 20-21) were used as they seemed most appropriate for secondary school students. The goal was to help learners reflect on their intercultural experiences to date and later assess their intercultural competence. The students were asked to go through the statements and mark one of the answers.

The Intercultural Profile task instructions:

> It is certain that you will have experienced many situations where you have had contact with people from other cultures, for example at your workplace, in your country, or in other countries. You will find below some statements that are related to such situations. Please tick those statements that are valid for you and that best describe your experiences.

> Maybe these statements are related to situations that you have not yet experienced. Please try to imagine such a situation and tick those situations that correspond best to your possible behaviour and reaction.
>
> Through this questionnaire you can record your own behaviour and past experience. The questionnaire is supposed to give you feedback on your strengths and weaknesses in this area of intercultural competence.
>
> Example: 'In the supermarket I prefer to buy products from abroad.'
> Not applicable - maybe - fully applicable

The changes involved adding age-appropriate instructions, as presented above.

The questionnaire is to give feedback on participants' strengths and weaknesses in the area of intercultural competence. Instead, these secondary students provided feedback for the questionnaire through their reflective essays.

## Methodology

### Researchers

Author 1 is a Polish researcher and a project partner in the Erasmus+ TEACUP project. She participated in the Modules' development and later in their dissemination and implementation of the project outcomes. The latter is the subject of this article. Author 1 has not met the learners participating in this study.

Author 2 is a German researcher and a secondary school teacher who participated in the Erasmus+ TEACUP project and the implementation of its results. Hence, he can be described as an author and participant in the research presented in this article.

Qualitative content analysis of the 21 students' reflective essays was done by author 2 since he is a researcher and the course teacher, and it is a common practice for teachers to assess students' reflections in writing (Thorpe, 2004, Broekman & Scott, 1999). Such a form of analysis is appropriate since the essays are descriptive and personal. The class teacher informed the students that their texts will not be graded. This task was part of other class activities with the focus on the topic of the European Union.

The reflective essays were submitted to the teacher in a typewritten or handwritten format. The essays were not anonymized when being assessed by the teacher because they were part of students' yearly work. They were anonymized for this

article, apart from Ahmad's work, whose first name and work are presented in the findings section of this article.

## Step 1 of the analysis

Author 2 coded data from students' writing manually while marking students' reflective essays, so that author 1 could make inferences about students' reflections in their specific context. This resembled the process of performance assessments, in which inferences are derived from a learner's product or performance, only that it was done with the edumetric quality criteria in mind, which emphasize the relation between educational assessment and learning. In this way, this process satisfies quality requirements concerning the validity and reliability of qualitative content analysis (Poldner et al., 2012). The last stage of the analysis involved summarizing the content analysis and extracting sentences describing students' thoughts about the Intercultural Profile in order to retain the meaning and context of their statements, which is presented in this article. Author 1 read the analysis and discussed its aspects with Author 2 to ensure its credibility.

## Step 2 of the analysis

The last stage of the content analysis involved both researchers working collaboratively using critical reflection as a method of inquiry in order to allow them to access their own and the learners' ways of knowing in richer ways (Morley, 2008). This method of inquiry is also used here to analyze how the authors conducting the analysis participate in discourses which shape existing power relations (Fook, 2002) and to see how this self-awareness helps them to analyze data more deeply. Critical reflection can be used in any research that is interested in different ways of knowing about how we might connect individuals with the means of social change by highlighting our own agency to respond to structural issues (Morley, 2008, p. 268), here linked to the intercultural competence assessment and the online Assessor Manual. The question that the researchers asked themselves was: *How do we know what we know?* This allowed them to look at the data analyzed in Step 1 and start the process of transforming their ways of knowing. The critical paradigm helped the researchers to analyze how the Assessor Manual was constructed and to interpret and engage with students' voices and their sense-making when engaging with the Intercultural Profile task. The authors acknowledge that the critical reflexivity practice impacts their positioning in producing the research (Koch & Harrington, 1998; Rosalso, 1994). A narrative of the analysis was produced and is presented in the next section of this article.

# Analysis and findings

## The analysis of the Assessor Manual

### "Who writes and who responds?"

The authors of the Assessor Manual, at the time of its design, were based in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany and the UK. Notably, the document does not mention the authors' names, so their gender or ethnicity cannot be identified. Only the authors' fields of expertise are specified: intercultural learning theory, engineering training and assessment, and diagnostic testing/assessment testing. Nevertheless, one can still assert whose voices are present and whose absent based on the content of the Assessor Manual and the literature used to design it. The literature is of Anglo-Saxon, German and Austrian origin and indicates that some of the names mentioned might be identified as the authors of the Manual. Interestingly, the authors did not base the Manual on any literature from the Czech Republic, yet one author was from that country.

Throughout the Assessor Manual, there is no mention of minority/refugee individuals nor how to assess the intercultural competence of people of different origins, individuals whose biography exposes certain ruptures due to being exposed to different cultures without being able to firmly anchor themselves in anyone of them. However, it asserts that "intercultural competence enables you to interact in a way that is acceptable to members with different cultural backgrounds." (p. 5) Where does this position the responder? Who is the person who responds to the questionnaire in view of the authors of the Manual? Whose vision of the world is presented in the Assessor Manual?

The following statements in the Intercultural Profile suggest that the responder is in the majority and has to learn how to deal with the Other (p. 20):

> "I find it difficult to adapt to people from diverse origins."

> "I often seek contact with other people in order to learn as much as possible about their culture."

> "When I am a newcomer in a group with people from a different country."

### "The danger of a single story"

The literature used (British, German and Austrian authors) in the development of the Assessor Manual suggests that the view of intercultural competence has a central

European focus, which may lead to invisibility and selectivity bias (one interpretation, simplifying and distorting) that is essentially an implicit bias in writing intercultural, educational materials (Sadker et al., 2010).

As shown above, some groups of users are not mentioned in the Manual. This can be described as invisibility bias, and one may expect that other perspectives on intercultural competence may be absent in the document. In fact, as the analysis of the document and students' work showed, nuanced perspectives on intercultural competence are missing. Therefore, it seems that a one-sided interpretation of intercultural competence and its assessment is addressed in the document,  for a specific group of people, simplifying and distorting complex issues. The above is an example of imbalance and selectivity bias (Sadker et al., 2010), which, when presented in educational materials, may lead to socializing students into accepting it.

## The analysis of students' work

The following statements testify to the students' general appreciation of intercultural encounters: "I think it is an enrichment to be able to talk and connect across boarder [sic] and exchange stories and habits." One important reason lies in the curiosity of seeing cultural stereotypes confirmed or refuted, in other words in a relish for fact-checking cultural clichés:

> I ticked fully applicable for the question if I often guess people's feelings by observing them in other countries. I can understand differences to the behavior of german [sic] people or see if stereotypes are true like spanish people [sic] are loud and happy.

Another reason is the fun in dealing with language as a manifestation of cultural differences and similarities. One student expressed interest in discovering lexical cognates when engaging with other people, noticing that different languages choose similar linguistic forms to express roughly identical concepts: "I also have some friends that also speak other native languages, so I like them to teach me some words in their language. It's nice to see the many similarities in unexpected words."

While European curricula tend to emphasize the significance of intercultural learning, a considerable number of learners regard culture as an interesting, yet negligible factor that does not, however, substantially influence acquaintances or the make-up of their peer groups. A student with a German and Polish background summarized this mindset as shown: "I think it's always good and important to learn about other cultures and the best way to do that is often by meeting people of that

culture. However, I don't find myself 'seeking' that. If I meet someone that tells me about their culture that's cool but honestly: then that's it." One course member emphasizes that one tends to make contact with individuals as individuals, without focusing on them being part of a specific cultural group:

> I don't (really) seek contact with other people in order to learn as much about as possible about their culture. I rather seek contact with other people in order to get to know them and mainly have fun [sic] them. If I then also get to learn about their culture (if they are from another culture) it's simply a plus, but it's not necessary.

The same student formulated her policy of establishing and avoiding contact along similar lines by transcending the factor of culture:

> [I]t's obvious that I avoid making contact with people from other culture [sic] who's [sic] behavior alienates me. But it's not just about people from other countries but rather people in general, because I think one shouldn't waste (free-) time with people that don't make you happy.

Individual and cultural encounters are ranked, as it were, in a relationship of necessary and sufficient condition. Generally, students tend to minimize the idea of culture as a factor of defining some sort of "speciality" but rather emphasize the individual over their cultural background. They emphasize the individual as an individual instead of identifying them as a member of a specific cultural community.

Reading between the lines, the analyst gets the impression that students implicitly refute the Cultural Attribution Bias (CAB) as defined above. One student, who was already very vocal in criticizing the overrating of the explanatory power of culture when talking about the intercultural profile in class, devoted some passages of his essay to further elaborating on this critique:

> The given intercultural profile in form of a table is in my opinion not too accurate nor applicable to a person's exposure and tolerance to other cultures. While statements like "I find it difficult to adapt to people from diverse origins." can give quite obvious results, there are a considerable amount of statements, left to be interpreted in diverse ways. [...] While the statement "In restaurants I often eat dishes with ingredients that I don't know." suggests that the one who disagrees does not show any interest in dishes of other cultures, it on the other hand doesn't account for the fact that eating dishes with ingredients one doesn't know is not something solely done to engage with more cultures.

In doing so, the student implicitly warns against using culture as a sort of Birmingham screwdriver or Maslow's hammer: "If all you have is a hammer, it is tempting to treat everything as if it were a nail."[7] Scholars should feel discouraged from maneuvring themselves into the Cultural Attribution Bias as a result of instrumentalizing 'culture' as an explanatory panacea. Reductionist approaches of this kind will seriously diminish the validity of intercultural research.

The same student points to a factor that guides interpersonal encounters that students rank even higher than cultural differences: ""When the behaviour of people from other cultures alienates me, I avoid making contact with them" can reflect one's level of interest towards other cultures, while overlooking personality traits like introversion and extroversion."

Various student comments support his view: "I didn't choose anything on the second statement because on the one hand I am interested in other cultures but on the other hand I don't really seek contact with other people which is why I didn't pick anything." The following might be cited as a particularly poignant example of highly idiosyncratic motivation for intercultural reticence:

> Even though I like to learn and talk I am not very communicative in my own language. I am generally not the person to come up to someone to start a conversation. This often comes in the way of being so curious [sic] and sometimes it's even negative for my mental health. I try to better myself each time and get to practise this with some good friends of mine that are part German and part English.

Another idiosyncracy, often ignored or overlooked and one which definitely escapes the radar of intercultural research, is made explicit by a student who honestly admits to what keeps him from reaching out to other cultures:

> In the following I am going to write about my intercultural profile. So, me as a person, I don't really like to try new things. So, with the example of the restaurant, which is on the sheet of paper you gave us, I picked "not applicable". Like I said, I didn't pick this because I don't like other cultures, rather because I am just kind of "lazy".

The authors found one piece of the student's work particularly appealing and feel it is worth sharing the whole piece of writing to present a full picture of Ahmad's

---

[7] Maslow, A. H. (1966). *The Psychology of Science: A Reconnaissance*. Harper & Row.

engagement with the dominant discourse in the Intercultural Profile task. Ahmad's work is representative of how a person whose biography exposes them to different cultures without being able to firmly anchor themselves in anyone of them. This is also what makes Ahmad's example unique in comparison to other students' work and significant to this study.

What is visible in Ahmad's essay is that he is not conforming to the dominant discourse, rather, he is resisting it by making an effort to question the dominant perspectives and introduce new perspectives based on his own biography by emphasizing the diversity and complexity of his identity.

Ahmad begins his texts by formulating doubts against the universal applicability of the IP, citing himself as an example of an individual that escapes the scope and grasp of the questionnaire. By stating that he "didn't have the same or even a similar life", he implicitly observes that the IP is based on an assumed ideal type of subject that he sees incompatible with himself and his own biographical background.

> After answering the questionnaire of the intercultural profile, I realised that I am kind of different. I didn't have the same or even a similar life. I might be as tolerant and as social as they are, but I wasn't really able to feel addressed by the questions.

> The reason for it is my experience in life and how I was in different places but never was really able to integrate myself because of the time.

In pointing out that he "was in different places but was never really able to integrate [himself] because of the time" displays his awareness that the duration of exposition to certain influences – be they cultural, geographical or other – is pivotal to the process of enculturation. This insight is further underlined by his statement that "[b]ecause of being a child in Syria, I didn't have the time to feel like a Syrian citizen and also to understand the culture fully, so I was lost".

> I am a teenager, originally from Syria, who had lived in his 'home country' for six years and then had to leave his country to go to Saudi Arabia because of the financial struggle of his family there.

Putting "'home country'" into inverted commas lifts the concept of 'home', as an individual's epicenter of enculturation, to an abstract or even ephemera level. This again underlines the close connection between culture and chronology, i.e. between the time of exposition to a cultural community and the process of enculturation.

> Because of the cancer disease of my father, he wasn't able to work in Saudi Arabia and just wanted to go back to Syria to see his family before his death. A few months later, he sadly died and me, my brother and my mother were lost in Syria and sought for a better life and future in a safe place. As a conclusion, we landed in Germany after a lot of tries and struggles. In the following text, I will try to reflect myself and my behaviour in my short lifetime using the intercultural profile. As one can see, the questionnaire is split into two sections. The first section is about encounters with other people in your home country, while the second is about situations where one meets people in their home country. These sections confused me. Am I German? Am I Syrian? Or maybe Saudi Arabian? The experiences in these countries have almost the same duration. Officially I'm Syrian but being honest with myself... I don't feel like a Syrian. So how should I answer? With which perspective? I will give my best to make you understand my point of view and way of thinking.

Ahmad raises complaints about the IC being incompatible with the mindset of individuals of a truly intercultural background. This is due to the IP sticking to the archaic and obsolete dichotomy between "home country" and 'foreign', the latter being expressed by Ahmad using the phrase "people in their home country". In other words, the IP clings to the polar opposites of 'me' versus 'you', 'home' versus 'foreign', 'in-group' versus 'outgroup'.

> Starting with the first section, I can clearly see that I am an open person that doesn't care about the origin of the people in front of me and only rely on communication and behaviour. My foundations and motives come from what I see and how I rate the behaviour of others.

Defining himself as "an open person that doesn't care about the origin of the people in front of [him]", Ahmad asserts what might be called 'culture blindness' when engaging with his social environment. He rates the synchronic aspect of direct face-to-face communication higher than diachronic aspects such as his interlocutor's biographical background and/or their cultural extraction.

> I don't directly see their actions as bad because I like to learn about other cultures, so I just ask. I am very honest and also social, so it's not awkward for me. It even helps me with my self-consciousness. The only thing I try to avoid, is hurting others by being too direct or pushy. Thank God, it's not an issue for me to integrate in different and new groups, as I had to do it multiple times. And obviously, one is supposed to help others who need the help.

Instead of judging a person's behavior, he prefers to inquire into potential determinants of his interlocutor's conduct at meta-level, while respecting certain rules

of conversational etiquette that are intended to shield his opposite number from unwarranted intrusion into their privacy. Interestingly, he regards his experience of having to adjust to new social contexts as a positive factor in navigating unfamiliar social intercourse.

> The second section that is talking about my behaviour and feelings in other countries made me come to the conclusion that I actually just accept the way of living in the place I am at and don't judge anybody. It is just still unclear why some questions are important for me or others, as the questions about the transport opportunities.

Ahmad's migration history necessarily entailed a repeated exposition to different social environments. Contrary to what one might expect, this has not led him to ascribe greater significance to cultural differences, but equipped him with a general openness in social intercourse. Instead of being acutely aware of the specificities of a new collective entity such as a cultural community, he prefers to assume a neutral vantage point toward his interlocutors that does not primarily perceive them as representatives of a certain group but as individuals.

> In my opinion, some of the questions as these about food or being able to do some extraordinary stuff aren't useful to accurately tell what the person means with. As a consequence, it might lead to different ways of interpretation and obviously also misinterpretation. Just some "X"-s on a table or spreadsheet won't lead to an accurate result or a result that might help anybody. To conclude, I wouldn't recommend this way of profiling interculturality."

By pointing out that "some of the questions as these about food or being able to do some extraordinary stuff aren't useful to accurately tell what the person means", Ahmad expresses his doubts against the validity of the items included in the IP. Moreover, his remark that "[j]ust some "X"-s on a table or spreadsheet won't lead to an accurate result or a result that might help anybody" reflects his skepticism toward the benefits of arithmetically ascertaining human aptitudes, in general, and intercultural competence, in particular.

## Conclusions

The literature discusses content of educational materials and the ideologies present in them but does not mention any information about the authors who write the educational materials. Why is this so? It is like trying to analyze someone's work without

the person and their voice in the narration of a text. Yet, authors bring their own cultural and ideological perspectives to their work.

The content analysis and critical reflection allowed us to expose taken for granted beliefs and assumptions about the intercultural competence present in the Assessor Manual. The invisibility and selectivity bias (Sadker et al., 2010) was identified in the document. These are the consequences of the still dominant ethnocentric monoculturalism reflected in the reductionist view of culture, which operates outside of the level of conscious awareness and can be detrimental to people who are not considered the majority (Sue, 2004). Reflecting on the consequences of ethnocentric monoculturalism in the Assessor Manual raises questions about the fairness and validity of intercultural competence assessments. This calls for a deeper examination of unconscious biases and a commitment to raising awareness among educators and assessors and a consideration of how assessment practices can be enhanced to be more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and equitable and go beyond surface-level responses.

The reconstructive aspect of critical reflection creates transformative learning and opportunities for new ways of understanding and responding to social problems but also to the dominant discourse (Morley, 2008, p. 276). It creates opportunities for empowerment by uncovering how dominant power structures operate and generating ways participants can self-reflect, resist and challenge the power structures, hence avoiding the trap of socializing students into accepting the dominant perspectives. Transformative learning involves a shift in consciousness, values, and ways of interpreting the world.

In the process of the analysis, we learned that young people minimize the idea of culture and emphasize the individual over the cultural traits and do not want to be reduced to their cultural persona. Students are aware of certain simplifications and distortions in the questionnaire, and that they may lead to misinterpretation and do not want to be maneuvered into a reductionist instrumentalization of culture as an explanatory panacea. The reluctance of young people to be reduced to their cultural persona suggests a resistance to reductionism. This resistance aligns with a broader societal trend where individuals reject simplistic categorizations that overlook the complexity of personal identity. The awareness among students regarding simplifications and distortions in the questionnaire indicates a level of critical thinking. This awareness is crucial for understanding the limitations of certain assessment tools and the potential for misrepresentation in intercultural competence assessments such as the Assessor Manual used in this study.

Designing educational materials that create space for learners to challenge existing narratives is essential. This can involve incorporating activities and discussions that encourage critical thinking, dialogue, and reflection on cultural assumptions. Perhaps materials' designers could aim at reinterpretation of the dominant discourses by creating space for learners to challenge existing narratives, but also by contributing to the evolution and enrichment of various discourses by introducing more nuanced perspectives and ways of understanding the world.

The world seems unprecedently perplexing and constantly evolving. To understand its complexity, we need to spend more time in not knowing. Are we ready to give up boxing individual behavior patterns ascribed to culturally defined groups? Are we willing and ready to be disturbed?

# References

Broekman, H., & Scott, H. (1999). Teacher development by using writing as a tool. *Teacher Development, 3,* 233-248.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching assessing intercultural communicative competence.* Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship: essays and reflections.* Multilingual Matters.

Conway, C., & Richards, H. (2018). 'Lunchtimes in New Zealand are cruel': Reflection as a tool for developing language learners' intercultural competence. *The Language Learning Journal, 46*(4), 371–383.

Fantini, A. E. (2009). Assessing intercultural competence. Issues and tools. In D. Deardoff (Ed.), *Intercultural competence* (pp. 456-476). Sage.

Fook, J. (2002). *Critical social work.* Sage.

Hampden-Turner, C. M., & Trompenaars, F. (2000). *Building cross-cultural competence: How to create wealth for conflicting values.* Yale University Press.

Hansen-Thomas, H., Gómez-Parra, E., & Muszyńska, B. (in press). *Translanguaging and transcultural awareness in global English language teaching and learning contexts.* TESOL Press.

Holmes, P., O'Neill, G., (2012). Developing and evaluating intercultural competence: Ethnographies of intercultural encounters. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 6*(5), 707-718, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2012.04.010

Koch, T., & Harrington, A. (1998). *The Unobtrusive researchers.* Allen & Unwin.

Koester, J., & Olebe, M. (1989). The behavioral assessment scale for intercultural communication effectives. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 12, 233-246.

Kühlmann, T. M. (1996). Die Diagnose interkultureller Führungskompetenz bei Führungskräften: Entwicklung und Erprobung eines Assessment-Centers. In H. Mandl (Hrsg.), *Bericht über den 40. Kongreß der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Psychologie.* Diskettenfassung.

Lambert, R. D. (Ed.). (1994). *Educational exchange and global competence*. Council on International Educational Exchange.

Morley, C. (2008). Critical reflection as a research methodology. In P. Liamputtong & J. Rumbold (Eds.), *Knowing differently: Arts-based and collaborative research methods*. Nova Science Pub Inc.

Muszyńska, B., & Gómez-Parra, M. E. (2021). Distance learning and educational course design in language education at university level. In K. S. Soliman (Ed.), *Innovation management and information technology impact on global economy in the era of pandemic. Procedings of the 37th International Business Information Management Association Conference (IBIMA)* (pp. 10753-10758). International Business Information Management Association.

Müller-Jacquier, B. (2000). Linguistic awareness of cultures-Grundlagen eines Traiuningsmoduls. In J. Bolten (Hrsg.), *Studien zur internationalen Unternehmenskommunikation*. Popp.

Pfingsthorn, J., Ditze, S.-A., Giesler, T., & Press, A. (in press). Virtual extensions of German EFL textbook representations of culture: cultural schemas and categories of heritage and migration seen through the HoloLens. In M. Alemi & Z. Tajeddin (Eds.), *Cultural linguistics and ELT curriculum*. Springer.

Poldner, E., Simons, P. R. J., Wijngaards, G., van der Schaaf, M. F. (2012). Quantitative content analysis procedures to analyse students' reflective essays: A methodological review of psychometric and edumetric aspects. *Educational Research Review, 7*(1), 19-37. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2011.11.002

Posner, R. (1991). Kultur als Zeichensystem. Zur semiotischen Explikation kulturwissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe. In A. Assmann & D. Harth (Eds.), *Kultur als Lebenswelt und Monument* (pp. 37-74). Fischer.

Rosado, R. (1994). Subjectivity in social analysis. From culture and truth (1989) reprinted. In S. Seidman (Ed.), The postmodern turn: New perspectives on social theory (pp.171-183). Cambridge University Press.

Rossiter, A. (2005). Discourse analysis in critical social work: From apology to question. *Critical Social Work*, *6*(1). https://doi.org/10.22329/csw.v6i1.5654

Sadker, D., Sadker, M., & Zittleman, K. (2010). Gender bias: From colonial America to today's classroom. In J. A. Banks, & C. A. McGee Banks, *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (pp.137-156). Wiley.

Stern, H. H. (1983). Towards a multidimensional foreign language curriculum. In R. G. Mean, Jr. (Ed.), *Foreign languages: Key links in the chain of learning. Report on the Northeast Conference on Teaching of Foreign Languages* (pp. 120-146). Northeast Conference.

Thorpe, K. (2004). Reflective learning journals: From concept to practice. *Reflective Practice*, *5*(3), 327-343, https://doi.org/10.1080/1462394042000270655