**The Intercultural Communicative Competence**

1. **Definition**

The Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has been the subject of interest of different researchers in different fields like social psychology (c.f. Brabant, watson and gallois, 2007), management science (c.f .Prechtl and Lund, 2007), and foreign language education. Within the latter, ICC refers to the learners’ ability to share their culture with others, and to look at it from an external perspective (Ho.2009), from the one hand, and to acquire “information or mediation skills, allowing for an insider’s view of the foreign culture and encouraging the negotiation of meaning across cultures” (Buttjes, 1991 p. 09). These abilities imply that intercultural learners should gain insights into both the native and the target cultures (Ho, 2009). Consequently, they will be able to act appropriately when confronted with differing others, gain self-confidence and security, and help others through skills of mediation (Meyer, 1991).

Concerning the subsequent abilities that compose ICC, Byram (1997) proposed five savoirs in addition to the linguistic, the sociolinguistic and the discourse competence. The linguistic competence refers to the knowledge of rules that allow for the production and interpretation of both spoken and written language, the sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to grasp the meaning from the interlocutors’ utterances taking into account different social constraints, while the discourse competence refers to the ability to use strategies to produce and interpret spoken and written language (Byram 1997 p. 48).

Byram (1997) discussed five factors that are necessary for successful intercultural interaction, and which are:

1. Savoir : knowledge of self and the other, and interaction.
2. Savoir comprendre : skills of inerpreting and relating.
3. Savoir s’engager : skills of critical cultural awareness.
4. Savoir apprendre/faire : skills to discover and/or interact.
5. Savoir être : attitudes ; relativising self and valuing others.

(Byram, 1997 p.34)

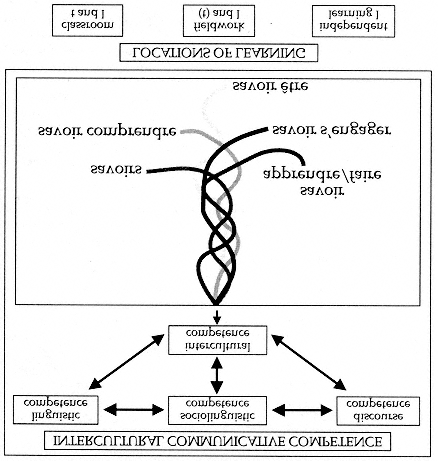
The following figure shows how the different saviors and sub-competencies interrelate and complete each other.

Figure 02. Byram’s Model ofICC (Byram, 1997 p. 73)

As shown in the figure, *Knowledge***;** it is divided into two main categories :

**a/** knowledge about the social groups to which the individual belong, besides knowledge about the interlocutor’s group. The former is acquired through the processes of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ socialization that takes place within the family, while the latter through formal education. Knowledge about the other groups can be raised through contact with their members. These days technology and communication networks allow for a huge exchange between groups, that travelling abroad is not necessary to have contact with different groups. Moreover, individuals have more knowledge about countries that gained dominance in politics and Media like the U.S.A.

**b/** Knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels. Knowledge of oneself and the differing other is not enough for successful interaction; it should be twined with the knowledge of how to act appropriately in different situations.

*Skills of Interpreting and Relating***;** these skills are based on knowledge i.e. already acquired knowledge of both the native and the other contexts. This knowledge helps in the establishment of relationships, understanding and discovering meanings, and resolving dysfunctions and contradictions.

*Skills of critical cultural awareness***;** they refer to learners’ ability “to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries” (Byram, 1997 p.53).Critical cultural awareness is a central element within ICC, and its development helps learners to take action, and be active citizens (Byram, 2008).

*Skills of discovery and interaction***;** they are useful when the existing knowledge is not enough to deal with a particular situation. Individuals need to discover new phenomena and elicit their meanings then relate them to others. Although the skill of discovery can operate in different ways, social interaction is the most prominent mode.

*Attitudes;*they regarded a pre-condition for successful interaction, be they negative as prejudice or stereotypes or positive. Hence, FL learners need to develop

attitudes of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment with respect to others’ meanings, beliefs and behaviours […], willingness to suspend belief in one’s own meanings and behaviours, and to analyse them from the view point of the others ( Byram 1997 p 34).

In other words, learners need to ‘decentre’ themselves from their own culture, to ‘reconstruct’ their social identity according to the new norms in a process of “tertiary socialization” (p 34).

Byram (1997) argued that these skills are not separate but interdependent and operate in relation to each other. They could be acquired through personal experience and interaction, but also through education, be it in class or pedagogically structured outside the classroom.

Byram (1997) further claimed that not only verbal communication should be given importance, but non-verbal communication also should be considered since it is a crucial element of interaction. Byram (2006) revised this description and claimed that to be interculturally competent, EFL learners have to display a number of affective, behavioural and cognitive capacities. First, attitudes/ affective capacities embed acknowledgement of the identities of others, respect of otherness, tolerance for ambiguity, and empathy. Second, behavioural capacities include flexibility and communicative awareness. Third, cognitive capacities refer to knowledge, knowledge discovery, interpreting and relating, and critical cultural awareness.

1. **Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence**

The development of ICC does not imply an abandonment of one’s culture, but rather an understanding of the self and others to avoid judgment (Byram,1991). However, the process of being intercultural is “unique for each individual and takes place in the interaction between individuals and in self-reflection of the individual” (Lundgren, 2009 p.137). Mayer (1991) suggested three levels of intercultural performance:

1. Monocultural level; it is a starting point where learners cannot realize or solve intercultural problems. Learners at this level are ethnocentric; they use their mother culture when they encounter interaction problems.
2. Intercultural level; the learner can realize and explain differences between his own culture and the target culture based on previously acquired knowledge. However, they are not able to mediate, negotiate or solve interaction problems. This level implies a number of intermediate stages.
3. Transcultural level; learners are able to realize, explain, negotiate differences, and solve intercultural problems. They show a cross-cultural understanding without neglecting their own culture and identity.

Similarly, Afrin (2013) suggested that learning about other cultures should follow given stages:

* The elementary stage: in which teachers discuss with learners everyday practices of the target language peers; their families, living conditions, festivals, relations with others, marriage customs…
* Intermediate and advanced stages: they discuss subjects like geography, history, business, music and arts (Afrin, 2013 p.73).

These stages are referred to as: basic, intermediate and full levels and have been agreed upon by researchers (Prechtl & Davidson Lund, 2007).

The development of ICC is neither related to language competence nor to reflective and professional competences (Kordes, 1991). In other words, having a good linguistic competence does not ensure having developing ICC, and the same for other professional competences. Although the integration of culture within the foreign language class is inevitably agreed upon by a wide range of researchers, the problem lies in the methods that teachers follow to present the target culture in class. In other words, the sustain of the old habit of putting emphasis on grammatical correctness, inherited from structural approaches, is noticed (Dai, 2011).