Developing a Critical Intercultural Perspective in Language Learning

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Abstract

Intercultural language teaching and learning is one manifestation of the critical turn in language education. Its critical dimension is characterised by a strong emphasis on self-reflexivity in both teaching and learning, and by a transformational agenda for language education (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Within language education, the critical project requires that the focus of language learning is to develop social actors capable of using language repertoires in ways that provide for agency both over language (in the choices they make about how to use their language resources) and through language (in the social possibilities they realise for themselves through their language repertoires). Within such a view of education, critical reflection comes to play an important role. To consider language education in such a way requires reconceptualising some of the fundamental starting assumptions of language education, which provides a basis for creating new emphases in both theory and practice.

1 Introduction

Language education has begun to engage with the field of intercultural communication in more significant ways since the 1990s. This engagement has involved a shift in thinking about the nature and goals of language education, the pedagogies that are required, and how we understand learners' development as language users (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). This emphasis on the intercultural has focused on the idea of language learners as emerging participants in communication in contexts of linguistic and cultural diversity in addition to being only acquirers of the language code. This in turn has led to a view of language teaching that involves reflective engagement with languages, cultures, and communication through which learners come to develop their understanding of their own situatedness within languages and cultures and develop the abilities to work within and across languages to achieve communication goals, to construct and present identities and to develop greater understanding of self and other (Kramsch, 2011, 2021; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; McAllister et al., 2006; McConachy & Liddicoat, 2016).

This reflective engagement needs to recognise that meaning making is not simply about linguistic meaning. In language learning, it has usually been understood that learners' difficulties in communication result from lack of understanding of what words, sentences or texts mean and that improved understanding results for linguistic development. However, this is not the full story; rather

we need to think of linguistic meaning as contextualised and that culture, as a context for communication, contributes to meaning making and interacts with linguistic meaning. What is at issue here is not simply comprehension but interpretation of what is said in the contexts in which it is said and often language ability is not what is at the heart of the matter. For example, when I first moved to the UK from Australia, I experienced difficulty understanding the question 'Are you alright?' in social interaction, and this difficulty led me to feel a sense of frustration with my colleagues, who were constantly asking me this question, that grew from my sense of having been misunderstood or misperceived by them. The problem was not linguistic, as a speaker of Australian English I understood the words. What I did not understand was the cultural meaning of those words at the beginning of a social interaction. For me as a speaker of Australian English, my previous encounters with the question led me to interpret it as an enquiry about whether or not I was experiencing problems or difficulties. This was the cultural meaning of this question for me. When I first arrived in the UK, I initially interpreted such questions in the light of my Australian cultural understanding as accommodating and expressing concern for a new arrival. However, when the question continued to be asked over a number of weeks, I began to think my colleagues thought I was not coping, or not able to cope, with my new context, a feeling which I did not share, hence the sense of frustration. It was only eventually that I was able to come to understand that the question 'Are you alight?' was a local variant of 'How are you?' and thus a social ritual to start conversation. That is, I was able to understand the cultural meaning this question had for my interlocutors. The difference in cultural meanings was not evidenced by the words themselves, nor by the context of situation as the same words could be said by the same participants at the same point in the conversation in each context, but by the context of culture, which differed significantly for each participant. The realisation of the differences in the contexts of culture involved, and reflecting on how these shape communication, constitutes the basis of intercultural learning in such cases.

While language curricula increasingly include intercultural understanding or awareness as a goal for language education, there has been little guidance for teachers in curricula about what this means in terms of teaching. One result of this has been the persistence of culturalist (Bayart, 2002) ways of teaching languages and cultures that constructs static, monolithic, essentialised representations of cultures, focuses on cultures as national attributes and reifies national differences, and solidifies cultural boundaries thereby perpetuating an us-vs-them mentality in intercultural contact. A further result has been a fact-based teaching of cultures that has little connection to the communicative needs and realties of language learners, and which often positions them as consumers of cultural information about places, people, and practices of (exoticised) others rather than as active participants in intercultural communication (Liddicoat, 2004). Such approaches present languages and cultures uncritically and unreflectively and contribute little to the overall aims of developing intercultural understanding.

As the intercultural has become more entrenched into thinking about language learning, the idea that language learning needs to adopt a critical perspective has emerged as a key feature of contemporary ways of understanding teaching and learning (Dasli & Díaz, 2017; Guilherme, 2002; Helm, 2017; Liddicoat, 2017, 2019; Phipps & Levine, 2012). This article will explore the notion of criticality in the context of intercultural language learning and consider how moving towards a critical perspective influences how we understand the language teaching and learning as education activities.

2   Criticality in intercultural language teaching and learning

Proposals for a critical perspective in language education are not particularly new but they have evolved over time. This section will consider some of the ways that criticality has been understood in discussion of language teaching and learning and consider some alternative ways of framing criticality as a part of language education. In particular it will consider the ways that the critical has been constructed by Byram, Kramsch and Liddicoat to exemplify three differing but related conceptualisations of the critical.

Byram's (1997, 2021) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence is arguably the first

articulation of a critical response to cultures in a model of language learning. He articulates a critical perspective in formulation of savoir *s'engager*, which involves "An ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of a systematic process of reasoning, values present in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 2021, p. 140). While the formulation may reflect aspects of a culturalist framing with its focus on countries, it does emphasise that the learner is not simply a receiver of linguistic and cultural information but is actively engaged in responding to it. Byram has argued that it is this critical response that is central to the educational contribution of language education (Byram, 2012). Byram's main focus for criticality is reflection on values, which are thus privileged over other aspects of culture. In the revised edition of his book (Byram, 2021), Byram develops this critical dimension more than in the earlier edition (Byram, 1997) and argues that savoir *s'engager* includes elements such as considering power relationships and political engagement and so positions it largely as a consideration of macro-sociological phenomena in (other) countries and the learners engagement with other groups, rather than as a more local engagement of the learner in micro-moments of diversity.

Kramsch (2006, 2011; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008) has proposed a dimension of the critical which is more oriented to the individual and the individual's interactions with others. Kramsch (2009) has proposed the idea of 'symbolic competence' to address the shortcomings of such models of language teaching and to emphasise the 'symbolic power' of language and the 'symbolic nature' of the multilingual subject. For Kramsch language use is symbolic because it relates "not only to representations of people and objects in the world but to the construction of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, aspirations, values through the use of symbolic forms" (p. 7). It is composed of abilities to:

- Understand the symbolic value of symbolic forms and the different cultural memories evoked by different symbolic systems;
- Draw on the semiotic diversity afforded by multiple languages to reframe ways of seeing familiar events, create alternative realities, and find an appropriate subject position 'between languages' so to speak;
- Look both at and through language and to understand the challenges to the autonomy and integrity of the subject that come from unitary ideologies and a totalising networked culture (Kramsch, 2009, p. 201).

Kramsch argues that symbolic competence is to be understood as adding something to the scope of language learning not replacing emphases on language structures and function, which remains important:

> Symbolic competence does not do away with the ability to express, interpret, and negotiate meanings in dialogue with others, but enriches it and embeds it into the ability to produce and exchange symbolic goods in the complex global context in which we live today (Kramsch, 2006, p. 251).

As Kramsch seeks to expand the focus and nature of language education in her definition of symbolic competence, Dasli and Díaz (2017) argue that it can be considered as a 'complementary alternative' to Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence that is more oriented to the fluidity and dynamicity of intercultural exchanges, and which focuses on the development of subjectivity and the historicity of experience. This argument demonstrates that the various ways of thinking about criticality are not competing proposals but rather elaborations that extend the scope and focus of criticality in language learning.

Liddicoat (2017, 2019), drawing on the work of Habermas (1968, 2015), has developed the idea of the object of focus in critical education as the individual learner in interaction with linguistically and culturally diverse others. While this line of thinking draws on Kramsch's work on symbolic competence, it develops further the idea of learning to participate in diversity and what this requires of the language learner. Habermas (1968, 2015) argues that learning involves engaging both with

knowledge of the world, which is developed through experiences, and the reflective appropriation of human life (Mouton, 1993), which enables understanding of the nature of experience. The process of appropriation involves constructing knowledge obtained from experiences and integrating this into one's existing interpretations of the world so that knowledge becomes available for action in and on the world. The appropriation of human life involves transcending the self-referential nature of one's own thinking; that is, moving beyond interpretations that conceive experience only from one's own perspective (Habermas, 1992a, 1992b). To engage with another, people need to create a mutually shared subjectivity through a reflective engagement with the range of perspectives that co-exist in the interaction and to come to an understanding of them. Liddicoat (2017, 2019) argues that in language teaching and learning, the appropriation of human life requires an engagement across and between languages and cultures and an appreciation of how languages and cultures shape one's understandings of experience. The language learner comes to understand self and other, and the relationships between self and other, through a process of reflective and reflexive engagement with experiences of languages and cultures in acts of communication. This involves coming to understand the self, not simply the other, as has often been the focus in culture teaching in language education. Most importantly, it involves coming to understand the self in relation to the other by coming to understand what engagement with others reveals about the self and the consequences of such self-discovery for future engagement with others. As Liddicoat argues (2019, p. 19): "The critical project is not one of assimilation to the culture of the other, but rather a movement beyond self-referentiality towards a multi-perspectival view of human lived experience". The critical dimension of language learning is, therefore, characterised by an emphasis on self-reflexivity in response to experiences of another language and its cultural contextualisation, and by a transformational agenda for language education. The aim of criticality is therefore to develop an understanding of self and other that can transform relationships between self and other, to develop awareness of one's own situatedness in languages and cultures, and the consequences of this for one's engagement with others. As an appropriation of human life, the consequence of reflection is to enable the development of agency as a user of language(s) in intercultural contexts so that learners are able to determine, and understand the consequences of, their own actions. That is, the aim is not for learners to unthinkingly mimic the behaviours of others but rather to understand the linguistic and cultural affordances of various ways of speaking and acting and to use these to construct their own personae in communication within and across languages and cultures.

The introduction of a critical and intercultural perspective into language learning requires more than simply adding a critical dimension to existing ways of teaching and learning languages, it requires rather a rethinking of the nature of language learning as an educative activity that requires more elaborated understanding of the fundamental bases of the field.

3   Language education within a critical perspective

Adopting an intercultural and critical focus in language education requires an elaborated view of what is entailed in teaching and learning a language (Scarino & Liddicoat, 2016). It requires a movement away from language conceived as simply a structural system of grammar and vocabulary and as a tool for information exchange, although these still remain relevant, to a conceptualisation of language as a meaning-making system in which people create and exchange meaningful interpretations of their lifeworlds for social purposes with a cultural context (Halliday, 1993).

Language education needs to engage actively with practices of meaning making in the ways that teaching and learning are conducted in the classroom. A meaning-focused approach to teaching has a number of significant features, some of which may already be present in communicatively oriented classrooms, but others which may not be.

Firstly, language teaching and learning require engaging students in authentic forms of communication. Authentic communication is communication that has a social purpose, which involves not just communication of ideas but also a presentation of self as a social participant in the communication. That is, language use involves not just communication of meanings but an enactment of identity.

This is true in any act of communication, whether it is a speaker in a social interaction, a writer constructing a text, or any other form of communication (Hecht et al., 2005). Each act of communication is created in context that involves:

- the context of situation (Halliday, 1985; Malinowski, 1923), the immediate environment in which the communication occurs including the participants involved (speaker-listener, writer-intended/imagined reader, etc.) and the social roles they adopt in the communication, the social activity occurring at the time, the mode of the communication, and the physical setting; and
- the context of culture (Halliday, 1985; Malinowski, 1923), the lived experiences of participants in communication and the ongoing social institutions and conventions that frame the ways in which people use language. This includes both those elements that shape how communication is constructed and those that shape how it is interpreted.

Engaging with authentic forms of communication from an intercultural perspective means treating such texts as instances in which the learner experiences language and culture as a producer or recipient of meaning (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). This means that the communication is not simply treated as informational but as an instantiation of social and cultural practices of language use by both the producer and the recipient, who each bring cultural, linguistic, and other knowledge to the act of communication.

In working with authentic communication it is important to recognise the relatedness of languages and cultures in making meaning (Liddicoat, 2009). In any act of communication, culture and language work together as co-constituents of meaning making and the 'full' meaning of communication consists of both linguistic and cultural messages that shape how the communication is understood and responded to, and what the communication is taken as doing in its context. 'Identical' linguistic messages, such as literal translations, may be understand as doing different things where the cultural meanings differ, with consequences for perceptions of the communication and the communicator, as the examples given from my own experience above indicates.

Secondly, language teaching and learning needs to be explicitly interculturally focused; that is, the intercultural dimensions of acts of communication, and their consequences for how communications are constructed and interpreted, need to be given explicit attention in the classroom. An intercultural focus involves the recognition of the relevance of culture at all levels of human sociality; that is recognising that any group of people constructs a culture through everyday interactions, and that cultures are dynamic and evolving (Liddicoat, 2002). It is therefore important to avoid replicating stereotypes of national cultures and presenting cultures as static, monolithic constructs (Holliday & Macdonald, 2020). Cultures are emergent, constructed, variable and contingent and are created by participants in groups through their experiences of being together and communicating with each other. In language learning in particular, it is important that the focus on culture is centrally connected to processes of meaning making as this is where language and culture intersect, rather than teaching facts about others, which inevitably leads to essentialising and stereotyping. Moreover, an intercultural perspective in language learning means placing the focus on the *learner* as a participant in diversity (Liddicoat, 2020; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) and not just on the other as an object of investigation and supporting learners in understanding themselves as enculturated beings.

The focus on the learner entails giving space for learners to recognise and reflect on their responses and reactions to diversity and to come to understand these and how they arise. This is done by opening space within classrooms for learners to engage in a process of reflecting on their experiences of language and culture as they encounter them in their learning. Recognition responses and reactions and reflection of them are central to coming to understand one's own enculturation, but also open ways of recognising the enculturation of others, and the consequences of differences in enculturation for how one perceives the world and the actions of others. This is central to learners' being able to decentre from their own perspectives and see events from multiple perspectives and developing the capacity to be open to accepting multiple possible interpretations of the same message, behaviour, etc. and recognising the legitimacy of these multiple possibilities.

Ultimately, the educational aim of intercultural language teaching and learning is to develop learners' capabilities as linguistic and cultural mediators (Liddicoat, 2022a, 2022b; Liddicoat et al., 2023). Being an intercultural mediator involves able to recognise when assumptions and meanings are not shared and work to establish common ground between participants in communication. This can involve instances where a language user recognises and responds to instances where they themselves do not share common ground with those with whom they are communicating, or where they work to establishing common ground for others who have difficulty communicating (Gohard-Radenkovic et al., 2004; Liddicoat, 2014). Mediation ultimately relies on a reflective and critical approach to understanding one's experiences of language and culture and to the development of self-understanding in relation to others.

The nature of the learning required to participate in linguistic and cultural diversity is thus different from learning understood as the acquisition of linguistic forms. It requires the ability to see what lies behind language in use, how one responds to different ways of constructing and communicating meaning in different contexts and what one's reactions reveal about the self, the other and the consequences of understanding the diverse possibilities that exist in interaction. The next section will consider what such learning may look like.

4   Critical intercultural learning

In order to understand the nature of the learning that is the target of intercultural language teaching, it is useful to examine instances in which language learners demonstrate the ways in which they have adopted a critical reflective stance in relation to their experiences of communicating in and across languages and cultures.

In example 1, Liam recounts his experiences as a learner of French. Liam is an *ab initio* learner in the first year of studying French at an Australian university. He is a first-language speaker of English and he had been studying French for just over a semester at the time of the interview. In discussing his experiences as a learner of French, he frames his difficulties in learning French in terms of knowing 'how to be me'.

Example 1: I don't know how to be me

Liam:	The big challenge for me in learning French isn't really you know grammar and vocab. That's sort of okay. It's that I don't know how to be me in French.
Researcher:	What do you mean by that?
Liam:	Well like uhm there's ways we do things here in Australia and I know that stuff but you can't just like just do that in French. It's like the words don't go together the right way or something.
Researcher:	Can you give me an example?
Liam:	Well you know there's *tu* and *vous*. And so you don't know what to call people. You have to think about that and I never had to before. It just comes easily in English, but you well you can make a mistake in French. And the uhm the mistake isn't like just grammar it's going to affect how you like speak with people and uhm what they sort of think of you.
Researcher:	So how's that a problem for 'being me' in French?
Liam:	Okay so you know in Australia you want to be friendly with strangers right? And so that's how I do things and I think of myself as being friendly.
Researcher:	mhm
Liam:	So in French how do you do that? How are you friendly to strangers? Uhm I mean you've got *vous* and that doesn't sound friendly to me, but there's only some people you can say *tu* to. And if you say *tu* it doesn't sound friendly cos it could be rude. Like uhm I think I'm a friendly person but I don't know how to do that in French.
Researcher:	So how do you solve that?

Liam: I don't know. ((laughs)) For now, it's like a problem and I'm looking for how to do it. When I talk with people I think about what they do and like see if I can learn from that. But just now I don't know.

In this extract Liam frames his difficulties as a learner of French in terms of his identity when speaking French (knowing how to be me). He argues against the forms of language as the central problem and relates it instead to an issue of self-presentation and of the enactment of identity within a different linguistic and cultural framing. This then is a problem in the appropriation of human life. In pursuing this idea, he argues that his experiences of living and communicating in Australia have furnished him with a repertoire with which to enact the self, but that French does not afford the same possibilities for self-enactment as (Australian) English. When pushed for an example, Liam invokes the pronoun system in French and the differing realisations of the second person pronouns. He argues that the pronoun system poses a problem of meaning making for him as it involves coming to participate in a different conceptualisation of human relationships from what he has previously been required to make (see also Liddicoat, 2006). Liam recognises that errors in using French pronouns are not only a grammatical issue but an issue of relationship with others that has consequences for how a speaker is understood and evaluated by others (McConachy & Liddicoat, 2021). At this point, Liam is conscious of himself as a participant in diversity, but a participant who does not have the repertoire he needs to enact his participation. He is aware of aspects of the perspectives of both his cultural starting points and of the cultural context into which he wishes to move but does not yet have the means by which to accomplish both perspectives.

The interviewer then returns to the starting point – the issue of 'being me' and asks how the pronoun system in French relates to this issue. At this point Liam returns again to the issues of identity and self-presentation. In reflecting on this, Liam articulates his self-understanding as a friendly person, which he identifies as stemming from his enculturation in an Australian English cultural context. He then problematises realising this self-identity in French and the ways the pronoun system challenges his understanding of how to perform a 'friendly' self. In this discussion, Liam himself is the object of his reflection – it is not 'the French' who create his problem but rather his desire to present a particular identity using the different linguistic and cultural resources that the French language provides for him, and so the focus here continues to be on Liam as a participant in diversity. When the researcher asks him how he can resolve the question, he says that at the present moment in learning that is not possible; that is, he does not have the knowledge/resources to enact his agency using the French language. However, he nonetheless adopts an agentive position in relation to the problem in that he expresses his own responsibility for resolving the problem and outlines the actions he is taking to attempt to do this. Liam thus reveals his critical reflection on features of the French language that he is learning and that he considers these features not simply as linguistic facts but as things which are consequential for his own participation in French-speaking contexts. For an analysis of the mediational work in this example, see Liddicoat (2014).

In example 2, James recounts an incident that occurred during a visit to Japan. James is an intermediate level learner of Japanese who had made a number of short visits to Japan and at the time of recording the interview was in the third year of his undergraduate program at an Australian university. In the interview, he raises a critical incident in which he observed an unexpected behaviour in a Japanese restaurant that challenged his ideas about being a speaker of Japanese.

Example 2: Not wanting to be that person
James: On one of my visits to Japan I was in a restaurant at Tokyo station and there was this uh older guy at one of the tables an' he really shocked me.
Researcher: What did he do?
James: Well um it was a restaurant right? And he was at a table and they were eating and he just turns around and calls out to the waitress "*nama:::*" ((draught beer)), just like that. And I was just like shocked. He didn't even look at her, just called out.

Researcher:	hmm.
James:	And I like thought that's so rude. Um, I mean, you always think of Japanese people as super polite. But he just said "*nama::*" and he got his beer. And like you know I didn't think they would do that.
Researcher:	So why did you think it was rude?
James:	Well um you know, it's not the way we would do it here. You can't just say that. You have to ask and say please and stuff. So it wasn't my way. But it wasn't like what we learn in class either. It's always "oh you've got to be so polite" and "Japanese people are all polite" and stuff. And we spend so much time learning polite stuff.
Researcher:	mhm
James:	It was um sorta like the first time I'd seen it. But you know after a while, you seen it happen and you think they're not all like what we learn in class. There's other stuff, like a whole range of things people do.
Researcher:	So how do you understand what he did?
James:	Well uh it's like it all depends who's there. I guess, um like it's because he's a man and old and that and she was just a young girl. So I thought it was a bit sexist, you know, when it happened. And that's something you get in Japan.
Researcher:	mhm.
James:	And I've seen other times, that people sometimes aren't polite to waiters and people in shops. They just say what they want or point or something and that's all. And the waiters and shop people are all like so super polite. Um, it's like in Japanese they say something like *kyaku-sama, kami-sama* ((the customer [is a] god)). You know, the customer is like a god. So if you're a god, I guess you don't have to be polite. But for me it's a bit shocking, you know.
Researcher:	mm. So how do you sort this out for yourself?
James:	Well in the restaurant I started saying like *onegaishimasu* for everything. Cos I hadn't ordered yet. Like I was trying to show I wasn't like that guy. So not *nama*. I don't want people to think I speak like that to them. *Nama onegaishimasu*. Heh, heh I used to just say *kudasai* cos in class they said it was the word for please. But I wanted to be um politer than that to sorta show, I'm not like that. Now it's *onegaishimasu*, just cos of that guy who said *nama* and not you know wanting to be that person.

In this extract, James expresses his reaction to an observed behaviour – the construction of a request speech act by a Japanese speaker in a service encounter using what Brown and Levinson (1987) would call a bald on the record speech act with no redressive action – naming the requested item. He finds the behaviour he has observed confronting; he sees it both as 'shocking' and 'rude', and this challenges a stereotypical understanding of Japanese behaviour that he has developed from his prior learning experiences. The researcher pursues this reaction to the request speech act and asks James to articulate the reasons for his reactions. James constructs his reaction in terms of both his experiences as a speaker of Australian English and as a learner of Japanese. His Australian English enculturation requires him to include politeness work in such requests (e.g., saying please), while his prior learning of Japanese has emphasised politeness in a stereotypicalised way as a characteristic of 'the Japanese'. What this means is that James recognises the behaviour as fitting neither of the interpretative frames available to him. He then reports that, having noticed the behaviour once, he saw it replicated in other experiences he had during his time in Japan. As a result, he came to understand that his in-class experience had not been a complete picture of Japanese language use and actual language behaviour varies significantly more than what his classroom experience has indicated; that is, he has begun to realise the diversity and variability of cultural practices in the language he is learning.

The researcher then prompts James to interpret his observations. James does this by attempting to identity the contextual factors that contribute to variability in language practices. He recognises that age and gender have implications for what is considered acceptable behaviour. While he acknowledges the impact of age and gender differences on communication in Japanese, and thus understands them as relevant for constructing the interactions he has witnessed, he does not accept the world view that underlies the behaviour – it is sexist. He thus maintains a critical distance from the behaviour that allows him to assert his own value position in relation to the behaviour and to adopt a critical stance towards possible ways on speaking in Japanese. James' response here is a reminder that intercultural understanding is not the same as uncritical acceptance of others' points of view; it is rather coming to understand the perspectives that shape the interaction and the various points of view that are at play in the interaction. The aim is not to assimilate to the world view of the other, but to understand how that world view shapes behaviours. In constructing his account of Japanese ways of speaking, James also links the behaviours he has witnessed to other elements of his knowledge of Japanese discourses that may be relevant, linking his knowledge of business-related ideologies and interactional practices. Here he is making connections between local practices and more abstract cultural concepts. Again, he comes back to his negative evaluation of the observed behaviour and how this behaviour conflicts with his underlying sense of self and his personal values that have developed as a result of his previous enculturation. James' talk has constructed a tension between acceptable behaviours in Japanese and his own personal ethical position as a participant in diversity.

The researcher then asks James how he has resolved this tension between the different ways of understanding the observed behaviour of requesting. His response shows that he has drawn on his knowledge of possible Japanese ways of speaking that form his current repertoire and has selected a form that allows his to construct a particular representation of himself that is both internal to the Japanese cultural contexts but also allows him to maintain his critical outside interpretation. He does this by selecting a request behaviour that he sees a particularly polite, in fact as more polite than is potentially required, in the context. For James, then, his knowledge of Japanese can be seen as providing affordances for his self-presentation and for constructing a version of himself as a user of Japanese, that stands in opposition to other potential personae. Moreover, he does not revert to the forms he has been socialised into in the language classroom; he does not resort to the default strategy, but rather exercises agency over his language choices to create this particular version of himself. In this way, James finds ways of speaking that distance him from ways of speaking Japanese that conflict with his own ethical position, and which for him, reinforce his ethicality as a speaker of Japanese.

These two examples recount quite different experiences of language learning, but together that show some key ideas that underlie critical and reflective learning in language education. In each extract the language learners recognise that their starting assumptions about the world and how it is organised are not the only way to view the world. For Liam, this is linked to his previous experiences as a speaker of Australian English; for James, it is also his previous understandings of Japanese language and its use. For each of them, an encounter with the new has thrown their starting assumptions into question and this has prompted them to consider the consequences of their new realisations for themselves as participants in diversity. The two examples also reveal that moving between languages and cultures is a personal process of meaning making, as each attempts to understand and communicate their own personal meanings in the language they are learning. James does this successfully because his repertoire contains the resources he needs to shape a personalised response, while Liam is still wrestling with how to communicate his personal meanings. The solutions they adopt, and indeed the characterisation of the problems they perceive, are both personal and potentially unique to each. Having identified a problem for their participation in diversity, each learner seeks to find a personal solution to the problem they have perceived through a process of exploring and reflecting on the options that their language repertoire provides. James does this by selecting from among the strategies he knows for realising requests; Liam does this by recognising that his current repertoire lacks the resources he needs and adopts strategies to build these resources. They

both view language forms as resources for enacting self, that is, they are engaged with the meaning making potential of forms, not with forms for their own sake, and they recognise that different languages or cultures afford different potential for enacting the self. They both provide evidence of critical reflection on experiences of language use and the consequentiality of these experiences for themselves as communicators. The examples also show how reflection leads to agency over language choices that enables personal meaning making. James does this by selecting from his existing repertoire of possibilities forms that allow him to express an identity that stands in contradistinction to other possible identities, even though the linguistic realisation of these other identities may be less complex; that is, he is not motivated by communication strategies that would make communication less demanding but by the identity affordances of his understanding of the communicative resources available to him. Liam's agency is more focused on himself as a learner, taking responsibility to try and identify the linguistic resources he needs to construct his own personal meaning making. For an analysis of this example in relation to politeness see McConachy and Liddicoat (2019).

In considering the data presented above, it is important to consider the co-constructed nature of the learners' reflections in each case. The reflection that is articulated is motivated by the questions the researcher asks; his questions largely focus on interpretation of the experiences and the consequentiality of emerging understandings. Most of the learners' thinking is elicited as a response to the researcher's questions rather than as information spontaneously volunteered by the learners' themselves. The interactions here can be considered as forms of 'languaging' the learners' thinking and in making explicit ideas that may previously have been implicit and tacit, or perhaps underdeveloped or undeveloped (Swain, 2006; Swain et al., 2009), with the researcher providing the impetus necessary for the languaging to happen. This co-construction indicates that critical reflection is not only a solitary enterprise that learners engage in but can have a dialogic dimension. It is potentially in dialogue that ideas are refined and clarified, and such dialogues contribute to the ongoing development of ideas and the increasing sophistication and nuancing of reflection.

5　Conclusion

This article has argued for a critical perspective in intercultural language learning as being central to the educative endeavour of language learning. Criticality is evidenced in learning where learners are not simply acquiring a language but are using this learning to engage in diversity as plurilingual individuals making meaning with and for others. Such criticality is central if the goal of language education is to prepare learners who are able to interact in their new language across linguistic and cultural contexts. It has also shown what such learning may look like by considering the critical reflections of language learners as they engage with new possibilities for communication and self-presentation as the result of new culturally contextualised language forms and uses that they encounter in the learning experiences. By interpreting their experiences of language, learners develop new knowledge and awareness not only of language and culture but also of the consequentiality of language and culture for meaning making and their future language use. Reflection is central to this process of engaging critically with new languages and cultures and provides the fundamental source of learning about how to be a participant in diversity.

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