Overcoming Barriers to Intercultural Communication: The Role of Intercultural Awareness
Depășirea barierelor în comunicarea interculturală: Rolul conștientizării interculturale

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Abstract: *This article explores the role of intercultural competence in language learning within a globalized and multicultural society. Historically, foreign language acquisition was seen as a privilege of the upper class, aiming to emulate native-speaker proficiency. However, modern social dynamics, including globalization, migration, and technological advancements, have elevated intercultural competences to a necessity, urging a shift in traditional language teaching paradigms. This study highlights the insufficiency of linguistic mastery without intercultural awareness and identifies key barriers to intercultural communication, such as attitudes, ethnocentrism, and stereotypes. Drawing on established research, including Lindemann's insights on the impact of attitudes and Neuliep's examination of ethnocentrism, the paper emphasizes how biases and preconceived notions can hinder effective interactions among diverse cultural groups. Additionally, an interview conducted with students in the Romanian Preparatory Year seeks to analyze the presence and influence of various barriers on effective intercultural communication.*

Keywords: *intercultural communication; intercultural competence; stereotype; ethnocentrism; intercultural awareness;*

I. Introduction

For many centuries, the act of learning a foreign language was considered a privilege or even a trend, that was accessible only to individuals belonging to high society. Learning a foreign language required formal instruction and the demands were rigorous for the non-native speakers who were expected to master all the norms inherent in the newly acquired linguistic system.

Emulating a native speaker's linguistic competence was considered the ideal standard and in some respects this ideal is perpetuated even today by academics. However, the changes we face in a multicultural era where societies are deeply interconnected impose a revision of the priorities at all levels.

Immigration, tourism, academic exchanges, remote work from different parts of the world and, certainly, the internet, keep us connected to a point that acquiring the ability to communicate in at least two languages is now a matter of necessity. As a promoter of multilingualism, the Council of Europe made precisely clear this point, urging member states to implement linguistic policies that prepare citizens for living in a linguistically and culturally diverse

society. But mastering the lexical and morpho-syntactic levels of a particular language does not necessarily ensure successful communication. There is a cultural dimension to language sometimes overlooked by the non-native speakers and this lack of awareness, or simply indifference, may negatively impact comprehension and, more profoundly, long-term relationship with the interlocutor. The *Common European Framework of Reference* includes an intercultural dimension emphasizing two particular abilities that non-native speakers should acquire:

> the ability to act as a cultural mediator between one's own culture and a foreign culture and to effectively manage situations of misunderstandings and cultural conflicts; the ability to go beyond superficial, stereotypical relationships. (Cadrul European Comun de Referință pentru Limbi 89)

In other words, the non-native learner should acquire not only a linguistic package, but also an intercultural awareness and skills to address interlocutors appropriately. However, in the classroom environment the teachers are still tied to the traditional approaches, the "intercultural communicative competence" (Baker, Intercultural Communication 213) occupying a peripheral position in the learning-teaching process.

Overlooking the need to implement a modern teaching methodology in the classroom, aligned with the needs of the intercultural speakers, can have significant effects on future interactions with interlocutors from other cultures.

This is a serious issue since the notion of a monolingual and homogenous community is increasingly becoming a myth in the context of internationalization. Even in small countries such as Romania, internationalization has significantly influenced higher education through the introduction of English-taught programs and the establishment of a Preparatory Year for non-EU foreign students seeking to pursue degrees in Romanian-taught programs. In this context, interaction between diverse communities is unavoidable, and inadequate intercultural training can hinder effective communication.

Several factors can interfere with intercultural communication, particularly those tied to the environments in which the ingroups and outgroups interact. In order to accelerate the process of developing and incorporating the right tools in teaching activities, it is essential to raise awareness about the negative impact of these barriers on the interaction between individuals who belong to different cultures.

II. Methodology

This study utilizes secondary source analysis to establish a comprehensive theoretical framework for examining intercultural communication barriers.

The analysis centers on three pivotal dimensions: attitudes, ethnocentrism, and stereotypes. As detailed in the following section, Lindemann's research underscores how native speakers' attitudes toward non-native speakers can profoundly shape communication outcomes, highlighting the mutual responsibility required for successful intercultural interactions (Lindemann 419). Neuliep's exploration of ethnocentrism delves into the impact of in-group biases on openness to dialogue, shedding light on the systemic challenges arising from perceptions of group superiority (Neuliep 334). Zhang's examination of stereotypes reveals their dual role as cognitive shortcuts and societal constructs perpetuated through media and social narratives, which further hinder authentic intercultural exchanges (Zhang 531).

These perspectives collectively underscore the necessity of fostering intercultural awareness to navigate and mitigate communication challenges.

The primary data collected through semi-structured interviews with students in the Romanian Preparatory Year program provides valuable insights into the presence and influence of intercultural communication barriers, complementing the theoretical perspectives discussed in the study.

III. Barriers to intercultural communication

Attitudes. The researchers emphasize a strong relation between the attitudes engaged by native speakers towards the non-native speakers'accent and their comprehension of the message delivered by non-native speaker (Lindemann 419).

According to Lindemann, not only is the comprehension influenced by the native speaker's attitude, but also their perception over the non-native speaker's communicative performance. Her study raises questions over the power of attitudes in real-life situations such as in the multicultural work environment where a sense of "mutual responsibility" (Lindemann 430) must be shared by the native and non-native coworkers in order to successfully perform the tasks.

Lindemann's study is focused on the interaction between native Americans and non-native Korean speakers within the context of a task-oriented conversation: using the information contained by a map, the non-native speakers guide the interlocutors to complete their own blank maps. The study's results reveal that high English proficiency among non-native speakers does not necessarily ensure a successful interaction if native speakers'negative attitudes lead to feedback avoidance and problematic behaviors that interfere with the interlocutor's positive intentions:

> I have attempted to show that, at least in some cases, apparent problems of miscommunication that interactants may attribute to the supposed incompetence of non-native speakers may in fact be a result of native speakers'own negative attitudes. These attitudes, in turn, may be seen as rooted in ideologies that locate the non-native speakers as a subordinate group. (Lindemann 439)

Ethnocentrism. Empirical studies have also focused on the relationship between ethnocentrism, perceptions of an interlocutor's foreign accent, and the openness to engage in intercultural dialogue (Neuliep 341). Ethnocentrism, defined by Neuliep in terms of an inherent physiological response to perceived threat and competition, implies that individuals who experience a strong sense of belonging to a particular group proclaim the superiority of their group while labeling others as inferior. As Neuliep points out, this form of group positioning "can be dangerous and lead to pathological forms of ethnocentrism that result in prejudice, discrimination, and even ethnic cleansing" (Neuliep 334). This explains the ethnocentric individual's altered perception of non-native speakers and, consequently, the negative impact on intercultural communication. According to Neuliep, the foreign accent represents

> a cue to one's social origins and a powerful ingroup/outgroup indicator as it provides information about another's national and/ or regional origins, ethnic group membership, social standing and class. (Neuliep 341)

Stereotypes. The communicative act is particularly disrupted when an interlocutor is perceived through the set of attributes assigned to their group. Stereotypes, far from being "just cognitive representations of a social group, [they] also arouse feelings about the group based on those cognitive beliefs" (Zhang 530). According to Zhang, stereotyping provides individuals with a feeling of safety within their own group, as the negative mental representations attributed to the opponent group serve to proclaim the dominant status of their own. This idea is further supported by the tendency to engage in auto-stereotyping, attributing positive traits to one's own group: "As such, the in-group is associated with mainly positive qualities whereas the out-groups are labelled with mainly negative qualities" (Zhang 531). One of the negative effects of the stereotyping is its reinforcement function. Stereotypes are assimilated and accepted as inherent traits even by the target groups subjected to the negative stereotyping:

> Stereotype messages are shared and maintained not only among the dominant groups, presumably to justify the existing social system that

in fact bene fits them most, but also by members of minority groups who fall into the stereotypes self-fulfilling prophecy, therefore, justifying on their part the ruling group's dominance over the dominated minorities. (Zhang 537)

Beyond the influence of cultural groups with social status, stereotypes are perpetuated through various media channels, whether in TV shows, news, music, movies, podcasts, or radio. With its role as *a* "socialization agent [...] the more media use, the greater the influence of media stereotypes on the media public" (Zhang 541). Considering that we live in a society where distancing from virtual reality is almost unthinkable, the media continues to feed biased representations to its audience. A notable example is the media's negative labeling of Romanians as thieves or beggars. This latter stereotype was starkly reinforced in a European talent show, where a Romanian contestant was greeted by the jury and subsequently by the audience with an outstretched hand, considered the typical "salut roumain".

Social media plays a powerful role in cultivating biased cognitive representations of specific groups and reinforcing long-standing stereotype-based mental representations: "media research treats media as the situational priming context. Media priming works obviously on people's existing stereotypes at the unconscious level" (Zhang 542).

IV. Intercultural Awareness: Shaping the Intercultural Speaker

The overview of the research studies signals the fact that barriers such as attitudes, prejudices, stereotypes and ethnocentrism are still prevalent in the intercultural communications and raise awareness, at a profound level, on the language teachers' failure to implement a methodology that places at the center the intercultural dimension of the language teaching process. At a basic level, communication implies the learner's ability to master strategic, discourse and socio-linguistic and grammatical resources, but when learning an L2 or other languages, *a critical intercultural awareness* component should be integrated in to the core of the communication act, which is defined by Baker in terms of

> a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in communication. (Baker, Intercultural Awareness 42)

Without a detachment from the personal prejudices and an engagement into a critical and objective exploration of the culturally different, the other resources engaged by the interlocutor are doomed to failure. In the absence of

intercultural awareness, the interlocutor fails to use adequately his strategic and linguistic resources.

According to Baker's model of intercultural awareness, there are three levels that assess a speaker's competence in engaging effectively in intercultural communication. The first level, *basic cultural awareness*, involves the speaker's recognition of the role that cultural resources play in shaping meaning. At this stage, the speaker can make comparisons between their own culture and others, but these comparisons are often simplistic and generalized, and may be influenced by biases and stereotypes. At the second level, *advanced cultural awareness*, the speaker transcends stereotypical interpretation and gains a deeper understanding of both differences and similarities between cultures, as well as the diverse perspectives that exist within a single group. However, the limitation of this level consists of a persistent intercultural border "that separates cultures, with L2 users positioned between identifiable 'home' and 'target' cultures and languages" (Baker, Intercultural Awareness 44). At the third level, *intercultural/transcultural awareness*, lies a mature and evolved speaker who understands that their interlocutor is no longer merely a representative of a particular group, but rather a hybrid individual shaped by diverse cultural influences in the globalized era. Baker favours the term transcultural

> since involves an awareness of cultures, languages and communication which are not correlated and tied to any single native speaker community [..] and participants are able to move through multiple cultural scales simultaneously from the local to the national and the global. (Baker, Intercultural Awareness 45)

The emphasis shifts from mastering linguistic skills to effectively selecting communicative resources in a given context. In presenting this concept of inter-/trans-awareness, Baker aligns with Byram's idea of the intercultural speaker as "an attainable ideal [...] opposed to the inappropriate and unattainable native speaker" (Baker, Intercultural Awareness 37).

V. Navigating Intercultural Barriers: Insights from the Romanian Preparatory Year

In the context of higher education, where local and international students converge, it is essential to acknowledge that intercultural communication barriers can act bidirectionally. Students who choose to leave their home countries for an international academic experience enter not only a new academic environment but also a new community, with its own rules, behaviors, mentalities, and culture. For effective intercultural communication, these students must immerse themselves in the culture and language of the host

community while critically reflecting on both their own cultural system and the new one.

A lack of intercultural skills and awareness among students can pose a significant obstacle to effective communication. However, these challenges can be mitigated through the implementation and promotion of cultural and language courses tailored to their needs. For non-EU students enrolled in the Preparatory Year, these issues are often addressed effectively, as the program provides intensive instruction in the host country's language and cultural elements, facilitating their integration.

On the other hand, successful intercultural communication also depends on the attitudes of the local community. Biases, stereotypes, and negative perceptions towards foreigners can pose additional barriers. In this dynamic, the attitudes of both ingroups and outgroups are crucial. They have the potential either to dismantle misconceptions and foster mutual understanding or to reinforce stereotypes and deepen cultural divides.

Interview. Building on the concerns outlined above, our focus shifts to the practical exploration of these issues in the field. In April of the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year, I conducted a semi-structured interview with students enrolled in the *Romanian Preparatory Year* at the *University of Craiova*. Fourteen students participated voluntarily, providing both written and orally recorded consent for the use of their responses in this research. The interviews were conducted over two days, on April 17 and 18, 2024. Before agreeing to participate, each participant received a document containing the predefined questions that would be addressed during the interview.

The interview comprised 10 predefined questions designed to identify potential barriers—such as prejudices, biases, and attitudes—and to assess signs of intercultural growth, as the students were nearing the conclusion of their academic year (2-3 months from its end). The questions addressed were as follows:

1. Why did you decide to study in Romania?
2. How did you find out about the Romanian Language Preparatory Year?
3. What did you know about Romania before coming here?
4. What is your perception of Romania?
5. Do you feel that you have adapted to and integrated into life in Romania?
6. Do you have Romanian friends?
7. Do you speak Romanian outside the classroom?
8. What's your strategy for improving your Romanian?
9. Do you feel nervous when speaking Romanian with a native speaker?
10. How would you describe the Romanian language in a few words?

While some questions directly target potential barriers (e.g., questions 3–8 and 10), others are intentionally broader, offering flexibility for the respondents to elaborate. These questions (1, 2, 9, and 11) encourage more complex answers, enabling deeper insights into the participants' perspectives on the cultural dimension. The interviews were transcribed following the transcription guidelines outlined in *Romanian as a Foreign Language. Corpus* (Constantinescu, Stoica, 82). Certain sections were removed and replaced with the "[...]" symbol to protect the participants' identities, exclude irrelevant content, and omit parts that were unintelligible due to background noise.

Participants. In order to protect the respondents' identities, I assigned a unique code to each participant based on the following criteria: (1) order of participation; (2) gender; and (3) the first three letters of their country's name (Constantinescu, Stoica, 23). The resulting codes were: 01MSER, 02MSER, 03MVIE, 04MSER, 05MBUL, 06MUKR, 07FSUA, 08FRA, 09MSER, 11FUKR, 12MBUL, 13FSER, 14FSER.

The group is highly heterogeneous, reflecting diverse cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds. Notably, six students are from Serbia, forming a relatively homogeneous micro-group within the class. Their L1 is Serbian, their L2 is English, and some have knowledge of the Vlaha dialect, acquired through their parents or grandparents. These students reported that familiarity with the Vlaha dialect facilitated their progress in learning Romanian (01MSER, 02MSER, 09MSER, 10MSER).

Two respondents are from Bulgaria, with Bulgarian as their L1 and English as their L2. Other participants demonstrate more complex linguistic profiles. For instance: the Vietnamese respondent speaks English as L2, French as L3, and Chinese as L4 (03MVIE); the Ukrainian respondents have Russian as their L2, English as L3, and German as L4 (11FUKR, 06MUKR); the respondent from the United States speaks American English as L1 and Spanish as L2 (07FSUA).

This cultural and linguistic diversity enriches the study, raising crucial questions about its impact on both the process of learning Romanian and the participants' level of intercultural awareness. Every language carries an inherent cultural dimension embedded within its system, and learning a language without considering this complementary aspect creates a gap in learners' communication skills, depriving them of the ability to apply their linguistic knowledge effectively. However, the focus of this paper remains on the intercultural dimension, while the influence of previously acquired languages on Romanian language acquisition will be addressed in a future study.

It is important to note that the interviews were conducted in both English and Romanian. The initial goal was to conduct each interview in

Romanian. However, due to some participants' reluctance to speak Romanian, I left the decision to them in order to ensure they felt comfortable.

Results. When asked, "Why did you decide to study in Romania?", most respondents cited instrumental reasons. The Serbian participants primarily mentioned the difficult admission or graduation process in their home country compared to the Romanian higher education system (02MSER, 13FSER), the benefits of earning a European diploma, and the convenience of Romania's geographical proximity to their homes, especially compared to other European universities (01MSER, 13FSER). A Bulgarian respondent (05MBUL) mentioned similar reasons, while the Vietnamese respondent (03MVIE) cited receiving a scholarship as the main reason for choosing Romania. For the Ukrainian respondents, the war was a significant factor in their decision, but an additional question was posed to understand why they chose Romania over other countries. For example, the respondent 06FUKR explained:

> My mother thought about where we should go, and we wanted to go to Denmark, but after seeing the prices there, the taxes, and the climate, we thought it would be better to go somewhere closer to Ukraine. (Comaniciu)

In contrast, the respondent from the United States (07FSUA) had a more personal motivation due to her previous volunteering experience in Roma villages.

> I came here as a volunteer, and I was working with the children in the Roma villages, and because in the United States, I'm an English as a second language teacher for foreigners, so I fell in love with the culture and the language, and I came back in, what was it, June 2022, to help with the Ukraine refugees, and it confirmed I wanted to be here longer. So then I decided that coming to the Preparatory Year would be the best way to learn the language in a disciplined way, to understand all the grammar and everything. (Comaniciu)

When asked, "How did you find out about the Romanian Language Preparatory Year?", the majority of respondents mentioned that they learned about it through Romanian relatives (02MSER, 04MSER, 05MBUL, 13FSER), friends, or acquaintances (01MSER, 07FSUA). This highlights the influence of individuals who had already adapted to the new community or had a positive perception of living in Romania, acting as strong motivators for those considering studying her.

Regarding prior knowledge about Romania, five respondents (01MSER, 02MSER, 04MSER, 09MSER, 14FSER) mentioned being aware of similarities between their own country and Romania through interactions with friends, relatives, or Romanians who had visited their country. However, their responses lacked depth, offering only short, generic observations about shared aspects such as music, food, people, religion, and clothing styles. Their current perceptions of Romania remain focused on similar themes, emphasizing cultural parallels without significant elaboration. In contrast, other respondents expressed more nuanced or personalized views, often shaped by their individual experiences with Romanians: respondent 03MVIE described Romanians as punctual but not particularly open to people from other cultures, respondent 05MBUL observed that Romanians are not very athletic, respondent 06FUKR noted that some Romanians may appear cautious around Russian speakers, respondent 11FUKR characterized Romanians as cold and dishonest, respondent 07FSUA highlighted positive traits, emphasizing that Romanians maintain their traditions, are "more relationship-oriented" than Americans, show respect for elders, and share a similar mentality with younger Americans.

All respondents stated that they have adapted to life in Romania; however, 13 out of 14 confirmed having an active social life. Respondent 11FUKR mentioned enjoying life in Romania and having visited several cities but noted she no longer maintains friendships with Romanians due to some "unfortunate experiences." The nature of this adaptation can be analyzed through distinct patterns: some prefer to socialize primarily with friends from their own country (09MSER, 15FSER), while others have broadened their social circles to include students from different countries (02MSER, 03MVIE, 05MBUL), including Romanians (04MSER, 06MUKR, 07FSUA, 13FSER).

When asked, "Do you speak Romanian outside the classroom?" most students referred to basic daily interactions, such as at restaurants, malls, shops, banks, or workplaces. Respondent 01MSER reported using both Romanian and English, though he primarily relies on Romanian, stating, "because not a lot of people know English." (Comaniciu)

Respondent 02MSER mentioned speaking Romanian with friends and a Romanian relative, while respondent 13FSER expressed a preference for speaking her native language with friends from her home country.

One participant (07FSUA) emphasized her deeper engagement with the local community. She actively practices Romanian by interacting with people at church services on Sundays, attending weekly Bible study meetings, and volunteering at a local hospital, where she spends time with children undergoing cancer treatment. She highlights that "it's actually easier for me to talk with children because of the level of my Romanian" (Comaniciu).

In terms of strategies to improve their linguistic competence, some respondents rely on classroom materials and tools like Google Translate (09MSER), while others use language-learning applications such as Duolingo (07FSUA) or social media platforms like TikTok (13FSER). Additional activities mentioned include watching TV news (04MSER), listening to music (06MUKR), and reading magazines (14FSER) or books for professional purposes (11FUKR).

Regarding the presence of anxiety when speaking with native speakers, five respondents admitted to struggling with this emotion. The reasons cited included the difficulty of the language itself (05MBUL) and the lack of awareness among native speakers in adjusting their speech to the respondent's proficiency level (03MVIE). Three respondents mentioned that, while they do not feel anxious, they find it frustrating when native speakers are inconsiderate of their Romanian language abilities (01MSER, 02MSER). Respondent 13FSER expressed particular frustration, stating, "I do not understand why so many people, especially young people here, don't understand English. That's so frustrating for me." (Comaniciu)

In contrast, respondent 07FSUA shared a different perspective. She regularly speaks Romanian with her friends despite making linguistic errors, although she feels less comfortable in the classroom setting. She explained:

> When I'm with my friends, I speak freely because if I mess up, they just laugh and correct me. And it's okay for me because I know it's funny, and I laugh at myself too. (Comaniciu)

On a final note, the respondents described the Romanian language in a few words, emphasizing their personal impressions and relationship with it.

Some described Romanian as "Latin with music" (01MSER), "easy, beautiful" (02MSER), "an interesting combination of Romance and Slavic" (04MSER), "strange" (05MBUL), "a really beautiful language" (07FSUA), "hard" (09MSER), "a poetic language" (13FSER), and "romantic […] not impossible to learn, but not easy" (14FSER).

Interpretation. The data collected indicate that the majority of respondents are studying the Romanian language for academic or professional purposes, seeking a diploma that is recognized at the European level. For the Ukrainian respondents, the primary motivation, as previously mentioned, is the unfortunate war in Ukraine, which prompted them to pursue formal education in order to better integrate into their new host community. A particular case is reflected in the response of 06FSUA, who came to Romania specifically to gain a deeper understanding of the Romanian community. The fact that most respondents learned about the *Romanian Preparatory Year* through family members, friends, or acquaintances highlights the significant role that positive

cultural experiences from their own communities play in shaping their decisions. Additionally, the way some respondents described the potential similarities between their own cultures and Romanian culture indicates a superficial level of intercultural awareness. Their explanations were often brief and lacked depth, with the insights offered remaining underdeveloped.

Few respondents actively engage with Romanian culture through extracurricular activities. Practices such as reading books and magazines, listening to music, and watching TV shows can strengthen their connection to the language while offering valuable insights into the cultural context, mentalities, behaviors, and concerns of the communities they are integrating into.

Respondent 06FSUA appears to be at the threshold between *advanced cultural awareness* and *intercultural awareness,* as reflected in her active immersion in the local community. This experience has enabled her to critically analyze the relationship between her own culture and the host culture, even identifying cultural influences on the younger generation.

However, some respondents exhibited a tendency to generalize individual experiences to an entire group, assigning negative attributes collectively by stating, for example, "Romanians are...". Conversely, as noted by respondent 06MUKR, some Romanians may hold biased attitudes toward specific linguistic communities, further complicating relationships and potentially widening the gap between different groups.

Most respondents reported feeling integrated into life in Romania, emphasizing the significance of building relationships not only with local students but also with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, respondent 11FUKR expressed a sense of detachment from Romanians, underscoring how negative labeling can hinder intercultural interactions. Similarly, a respondent's preference for interacting exclusively with peers from their own country (13FSER) may reflect either social anxiety or a desire for comfort, which can impede cultural immersion by confining them to the safety of their ingroup. In terms of anxiety when communicating with native speakers, some respondents admitted avoiding the use of Romanian, citing natives' lack of adjustment to their linguistic level as a key challenge. Conversely, other respondents stated they did not experience anxiety yet declined to participate in interviews conducted in Romanian. This behavior could be attributed to the recording process, which may have triggered anxiety by disrupting their sense of familiarity and comfort.

VI. Conclusions

Acquiring "intercultural sensitivity" (Vromans, Korzilius 2) is a prerequisite for thriving in a multicultural world where the real boundaries have been blurred in favor of free movement and hybridization of societies. In the field

of education, these initiatives are reflected in the linguistic policies enacted by institutional agents at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, guided by directives from the European Council. Such measures are essential, particularly in light of the influx of immigrants and the student exchanges facilitated by international study program opportunities. Nevertheless, factors that undermine the effectiveness of intercultural communication are still pervasive. On the one hand, for many decades, educators have largely neglected the intercultural dimension of language teaching, addressing it only in a peripheral manner (Baker 50). On the other hand, the media serves as a powerful tool for imposing and perpetuating stereotype-based representations, both positive and negative, of different groups.

In this context, it is only a matter of time and commitment on the part of academic stakeholders to identify effective tools for enhancing learners' intercultural awareness. The model proposed by Baker, as outlined in the previous sections, is particularly valuable as it provides a three-tiered framework that not only serves as an indicator of learners' intercultural sensitivity but also offers a structured approach for designing appropriate classroom activities. Among the pedagogical principles promoted by Baker to foster intercultural awareness are the exploration of local cultures, the critical analysis of texts within language materials— despite their flaws, as they encourage self-reflection and a critical perspective towards other cultures—, mediation of the physical, or at least virtual intercultural interaction and exposure to media (Baker 55-56).

However, as previously discussed, media selection must be approached cautiously due to its potential to reinforce generalized and biased representations of specific groups. Other contemporary approaches such as "experiential learning" and "dissonance" effect (Vromans, Korzilius 3) present effective strategies for addressing and reshaping the prejudices and stereotypes embedded in learners' cognitive perceptions of other groups.

Nonetheless, substantial empirical research is still needed in the academic field to assess the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies in breaking down barriers to intercultural communication.

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