

“Virtual Learning Environments for a Real (Transcultural) Dialogue: Toward New Pedagogies in Culture Teaching.”

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Introduction

“Isolating one wave is not easy, separating it from the wave immediately following, which seems to push it and at times overtakes it and sweeps it away (...). In other words, you cannot observe a wave without bearing in mind the complex features that concur in shaping it and the other, equally complex ones that the wave itself originates” (Calvino, 1986: 4). These are the inner thoughts of Mr. Palomar, Calvino’s character in the short story “Reading a wave,” in which the protagonist, standing on top of a dune, seeks to observe a single wave. Palomar finds himself confronted with the dilemma faced by culture learners when they start to understand the intricate network that constitutes a culture, a web of cultures, webs of culture(s) of which they themselves are a part, *in* which they *play* a part. And just like Mr. Palomar was trying to find words to express the result of his endeavors, or, at least, the process, he found himself having to formulate hypotheses, negotiate meaning and understanding. Language was at the core of his mediation of his experience, just like language is at the heart of culture. Or is it culture at the heart of language? As Hinkel (1999: 2) pointed out, “a second or foreign language can rarely be taught or learned without addressing the culture of the community in which it is used”. In fact, for a long time, French applied linguists referred to their discipline as “didactique des langues-cultures” because they explicitly acknowledged that language and culture are closely related and interactive (although they may sometimes have been vague as to what that relationship explicitly was or entailed). We learn culture through language and social communication; cultural patterns and values are reflected in our language. And vice versa. Therefore, language can only be taught through culture, and language teaching ought to be embedded in a cultural context or in cultural contexts. Byram (1988) reminds us that the crucial idea behind context is that the construction of meaning occurs in the interplay between language, time, place, person, and circumstances. Language, thus, cannot function independently of the context in which it is embedded: the cultural context. This renders multilingual, transcultural encounters complex because, as the name indicates, the protagonists come from different cultures. In such instances, it is arguable that the success of the encounter owes more to the participants’ ability to decipher, interpret, and navigate the cultural context(s) than to their linguistic proficiency. What is culture, then, in the context of second or foreign language acquisition and what kind of pedagogies can foreign language (FL) teachers deploy to enhance both culture learning and transcultural dialogues?

Culture and culture learning

First, how can one envision the notion of culture in the current context (of applied linguistics, as well as, well ... real life), which I would willingly qualify as postmodern? The current context is marked, among other things, by (1) a much more fluid, discursive

definition of culture, and (2) a focus on issues of process and development in culture learning. Hall's (1966) introduction of an emphasis on a subjective component of culture, paired with his idea that culture is communication, has served as a precursor to current approaches to culture. Hall's idea of culture is as a matrix mediating all of human experience. This "postmodern model" of language and culture develops in interesting ways Geertz' notion of culture as a "web of significance", a system of interconnected symbols that warrant interpretation. Culture is viewed as discourse and, as such, follows the same fluid rules (Kramsch, 1998). Discourse is organized around signs or concepts that are not isolated from each other but are in fact very much in relation with – and refer to – each other (see, for example, Derrida, 1967). Culture envisioned as discourse is, thus, a social semiotic practice (Kramsch, 2002).

If culture mediates all of human experience, learning a foreign culture also means learning one's own culture (Hall, 1966). Consequently, within the context of FL learning, the negotiation and construction of cultural meaning and the learning of culture has to happen through the interweaving of the native and the target cultures. Culture learning has to go through the juxtaposition, comparison, and interaction between the culture of the learner (C1) and the foreign culture (C2) (Bakhtin, 1981; Kramsch, 2000). Kramsch (2000) further argues that C1 and C2 are themselves aggregated constructs of multifaceted perceptions (see Appendix A). These different perceptions have to be taken into account as they influence and shape each other. In other words, individuals shape culture as much as they are shaped by it, thus meaning is not within the individual itself, but rather in the interplay between the self and the other. Consequently, understanding does not come from the individual's own observation and knowledge construction but through human interactions (see Bandlamudi, 1994; Bakhtin, 1986; Kramsch, 1993, 2000). Learning culture, then, would be a dynamic trajectory that would necessarily start with – and go through – an introspective gesture of acknowledging and mobilizing one's own cultural background, values, beliefs, and so on.

So, although a full exposé on the nature and the extent of the relationship between language and culture would be too long to give here (see Risager's – 2007 – excellent book on the subject), it is important to operate under a definition of what culture learning implies and so that one can propose to set up an environment within which transcultural learning can take place. To this effect I will turn to the work of Paige et al. (2000) at the University of Minnesota:

Culture learning is the process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures. It is a dynamic, developmental, and ongoing process which engages the learner cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively
(Paige et al., 2000: 50)

I would like to underline two important aspects of this definition: (1) the notion that cultural learning is the didactic equivalent of a 'total body workout': all facets of the learner are engaged. This makes it an exciting prospect, but also a challenging process for teachers

and students alike: for teachers, because the responsibility is real to commit to it and feel adequate, for the learner, because learning a foreign culture can and will challenge one's beliefs and values; and (2) culture learning as process – a lifelong process, I might add. I would like to take advantage of this to remark that this statement, in a way, should relieve some of the pressure on our teachers to feel like they have to do it all in a semester, or that there is such a thing as 'coverage' when talking about culture learning (the idea seems suspect enough when talking about a literature curriculum). Building on this idea of process, I agree with Schulze's (2007) suggestion to adopt Paige et al.'s (2000) definition and five-pronged approach to culture learning:

1. learning about the self as a cultural being,
2. learning about culture and its impact on human communication, behavior, and identity,
3. culture-general learning; i.e. learning about universal, cross-cultural phenomena such as cultural adjustment,
4. culture-specific learning; i.e. learning about a particular culture, including its language, and,
5. learning how to learn; i.e. becoming an effective language and culture learner.

One might argue about the general character of this definition and the choice of certain terms, but this definition offers a workable framework within which to deploy a pedagogy to teach a foreign culture.

In the project that I propose to describe in this paper, this pedagogy is explicitly based on the following two premises: (1) cultural relativity, and (2) exploration of self and other. By cultural relativity, I mean that the necessity of putting cultures in contact with each other to invite comparisons or, rather, dialogue, as comparisons too often invite a judgment (superiority or inferiority), which would be the first – and fatal – flaw in culture learning. This dialogue, however, must be preceded by an introspective gesture and acknowledgment of one's own cultural bias. This dual gesture is at the basis of the ensuing discovery or dialogue between self and other. Consequently, in the gesture of culture learning, it is important that learners realize that one can only – and always – learn cultures, as that first introspective gesture is a *sine qua non* condition of whatever the next step may be (see Appendix B: Country Blue in Bekoff, Allen, and Burghardt, 2002). The objective of the current project is to guide learners to define for themselves what Kramsch (1999, see, also, Ware and Kramsch, 2005) calls an "intercultural stance", which I envision as a dynamic equilibrium between two (or more) cultures. To the term 'intercultural' here, I would prefer the term 'transcultural' to designate an inherently unstable balance, this learning trajectory that crosses boundaries between the particular and the general, between the individual and the social, between multicultural selves and others. Indeed, I agree with Risager (2007) that the national paradigm is obsolete. Yet one can still talk about French and American culture as long as one does not frame them within the borders of nation states. What matters, in other words, is not the C1/C2 cultures, but the trajectory that students travel between these abstract, elusive, and ever-evolving constructs. As learners explore their own culture and the other or foreign culture, the knowledge of both

their own and the other culture is going to evolve and with it, their understanding of both cultures, each of which being, of course, multicultural in nature (e.g. French and American cultures). If culture is envisioned as a social semiotic practice that is discursive and dialogical in nature, it seems to follow naturally that transcultural exploration follows the same model or, rather, the same medium, namely a transcultural *dialogue*. Comparisons between two cultures, McLeod (1976) advocates, are a good way to learn more about both cultures and identify patterns inherent to each, thus fostering cultural relativity. Learners should be encouraged to reflect on their expectations and their discovery of the C2 based on their own framework of reference (Byrnes, 1991; see the notion of languaculture, Risager, 2007), because acquiring cultural literacy “is not so much acquiring a checklist of knowledge, as developing awareness of the relation between selfhood and otherness” (Furstenberg, Levet, English, and Maillet, 2001: 75). We will revisit this idea later.

From theory to practice: Establishing the learning environment

It is in this spirit of establishing a transnational community of learners that this telecollaborative project started. Taking as a starting point the context of an advanced-level culture class, the pedagogical environment is set up as an electronic learning community (or a network-based discourse community, as Kern and Warschauer, 2000, have also called it) – or ELC. A community of 40 learners (20 French, 20 Americans) with two teachers (one American in France, one French in the US) meets weekly either via videoconferencing (three times to date) or webcam sessions (10 times to date). Although each one of the participating groups are based physically at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) and the École Nationale Supérieure d'Électronique, Informatique et Radiocommunication de Bordeaux (ENSEIRB) in France, the main locus of the class is virtual – halfway in-between and in both places at once – and conceived as a meeting place where dialogue – and learning – can take place. The technological capabilities required for such a project are somewhat heavy (which poses the problem of access), but increasingly available: two videoconferencing facilities, two computer classrooms equipped with at least twelve working workstations (including a webcam and two headsets with microphones for each station), projection capabilities, recording capabilities, and, last but certainly not least, high bandwidth. In this particular case, both institutions (UTK and ENSEIRB) are members of the Internet 2 consortium, which made this a non-issue.

Situated within a socio-constructivist approach (Vygotsky, 1978), this learning environment proves motivating as well as demanding for the learners, as they are, under the guidance of their teachers, the principal agents of what is happening in the learning environment and the success of their project is predicated on their ability to navigate and negotiate linguistic and cultural differences. The philosophy behind the ELC is twofold. First, as exciting as the project may sound for instructors and learners alike, the idea is to resist the temptation to mistake the means for the end; technology, here, only serves as mediation toward learning; it is not an end in itself (i.e., “don’t do it just because you can”). To achieve this first goal the idea is to keep things difficult and force learners to slow down instead of speeding up by making thinking visible (through journals, progress reports, class discussions), encouraging creativity instead of productivity (by letting learners take ownership of their learning and guiding them to become more autonomous), and guiding

learners to ask the right questions rather than give the right answers. Second, learning takes the form of an apprenticeship¹, where learners become members of a research team who have to construct websites to display and share the results of their investigation for not only their classmates but also the general public to see, giving the process a constructionist turn (Papert, 1991). Jonassen (1994) argues that within a constructivist approach, a learning environment should facilitate and enhance the construction of knowledge by providing a multimodal representation of reality and accounting for the natural complexity of the world. To this extent, learning should be situated in authentic contexts and be focused on a collaborative process of knowledge *construction* rather than the mere reproduction of knowledge. The success of the enterprise is predicated on the development of meta-evaluative or self-reflective practices. This project adhered to these principles and invited learners to become active participants in generating the authentic problems that they wanted to investigate.

This brings me back to the other reason why I like the term ELC to describe such learning environments, especially as they apply to culture learning. The notion of ELC is malleable in terms of the technologies that can be used but, first and foremost, it is centered on the concept of community. The notion of community has long been central to educational studies with figures such as John Dewey, for whom the notion of community goes beyond the idea of a simple association of human beings. By community, Dewey means individuals who not only share in interaction with each other, but also share in meaningful life experiences driven by common interest and objectives. The driving force of a community is communication, which is the construction of meaning through common symbols and language. Through communication, individual, as well as social growth are realized. Indeed, for Dewey, instruction and social realities were best served by being integrated with each other. To this end, Dewey contends that learning should be embedded in authentic social contexts and learning objectives should be aligned with the interests of society at large. Drawing on Dewey's philosophy of education, Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) developed the model of communities of inquiry, a framework developed to investigate online learning. For Garrison et al., the educational experience is located in the interaction of three dimensions: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. Social presence is defined "as the ability of participants in the community of inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to other participants as 'real people'" (Garrison et al., 2000: 89). Cognitive presence is defined as the extent to which participants, through collaboration and *sustained discourse*, are able to construct and reconstruct meaning, as well as reach and confirm understanding. This entails formulating and testing hypotheses against real-life facts. The third element, teaching presence, is the primary – although not exclusive – responsibility of the teacher and consists in the design of the educational environment (including materials activities), as well as the facilitation of the learning process. Evidence

¹ Discussing good uses of instructional technology, Bass (2000) identifies three main vectors: the learning process will be inquiry-based (learners are alternately assuming the role of social scientists and participants), encourage and develop communication across linguistic and cultural lines, and take a constructionist approach.

for the effectiveness of the community of inquiry is provided by the presence of indicators pertaining to these three clusters (see table below – from Garrison et al., 2000 – for examples of such indicators):

Elements	Categories	Examples of Indicators
Social Presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open communication • Group cohesion • Personal/Affective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning climate • Risk-free expression • Group identity • Collaboration • Self-projection/emotions • ...
Cognitive Presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triggering event • Exploration • Integration • Resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of puzzlement • Information exchange • Connecting ideas • Applying new ideas • ...
Teaching Presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and organization • Facilitating discourse • Direct instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting curriculum and methods • Shaping constructive exchange • Focusing/resolving issues • ...

Participants in this telecollaborative project essentially consisted of a 42-participant community of inquiry divided into 10 smaller communities of four participants each. Each group decided on a cultural phenomenon that they wanted to understand. This decision usually emerged out of a sense of puzzlement on the part of the group members with regard to the cultural realities with which they were confronted. Building on this triggering event, learners developed a plan of inquiry to investigate this cultural phenomenon as it manifested itself in French and American cultures, trying to understand how this phenomenon functioned in each cultural system and subsequently comparing and contrasting both cultural contexts. The success of the enterprise owes to learners' ability to become a full participant in their respective communities and form a cohesive team, as well as to my ability to guide and facilitate their research endeavors effectively.

Exploring and negotiating culture: The learning process

As I have just explained, this ELC environment espouses the principles constitutive of a community of inquiry insofar as learning is embedded in realistic and relevant contexts, since the students choose the topics that they explore and refine them in dialogue with and under the guidance of their teachers. In this environment, social experience both in and outside the learning environment is at the core of learning itself. Additionally, one of the overarching pedagogical objectives is to provide students with firsthand experience of the knowledge-construction process and to encourage them to consider multiple perspectives concurrently and let these multiple perspectives be shaped by emerging contents rather than constrain the results of their inquiries. Over the course of the semester, via this

learning environment, learners are encouraged to find their own voice as researchers and assert ownership of the learning process. They are also encouraged to use multiple modes of representation, both as sources and resources, as well as in the medium whereby they share their results (adapted from Honebein, 1996). Finally, learners are encouraged to become increasingly autonomous and self-reflexive, both vis-à-vis themselves and the knowledge-construction process (through meta-evaluation). In order to achieve these learning objectives, and before they embark on their exploratory journey with their transatlantic partners, learners have to be provided with a solid introduction to research methodology to be able to design an effective project and launch a sound investigation. Thus, at the beginning of the semester, I conduct a training session outlining the components of a research protocol for studies in social sciences using quantitative and qualitative data sources, that is to say:

1. how to formulate good interview questions – e.g. no ‘why’ questions, no ‘yes/no’ questions – on surveys or questionnaires, for example;
2. how to align interview questions with research questions;
3. how to ask questions in person; i.e. interview (listen carefully; be gentle, sensitive, open; don’t assume the interviewee is telling the truth) (see, for example, Rubin and Rubin, 2005);
4. how to be a good observer: when observing, don’t attribute meaning;
5. keep a journal;
6. learn to handle data, for example, coding (noting patterns, clustering/partitioning, counting, relationship between particular and general – see, for example, Miles and Huberman, 1994);
7. expect to be surprised by the data: what one is interested in may influence what one sees (problem of too much or not enough contextual knowledge). Don’t try to force-fit your data in pre-established categories.

Qualitative methodology of research is indeed particularly useful to accomplish the learners’ projects because:

1. it is based on ‘soft data’; i.e., rich in description of people, places and conversation;
2. it is particularly adapted to describe complex (human) phenomena where the variables may not always be operationalized;
3. data are collected through sustained contact with the people/settings;
4. the focus often develops during data collection or data collation. It is concerned with understanding behavior from the subject’s frame of reference;
5. although there is potential for researcher bias, acknowledging one’s position as a researcher and explicitly engaging this posture helps to reinforce the validity of the project (see, again, the story of Country Blue in Appendix B).

The tale of Country Blue characterizes someone trying to understand another culture who neglected to consider a basic limitation: his own colored glasses. These he did not, or perhaps could not, remove (and should he?). In an even more profound way, our human

glasses are ingrained in each and everyone of us, and are very hard to remove (if possible at all). Nevertheless, if one is aware of having biased lenses, one can attempt to address their effects on one's perspectives.

Equipped with this knowledge, the collaborative process can begin. All interaction occurs online, either in a "planned format" (during class time) or on learners' own time (they are very adept at exchanging e-mail addresses and IM logins (or even Facebook/MySpace information). Learners also have at their disposal a central web space on the online course management system (or sometimes they create one on their own). Having a common space for groups to collaborate and exchange documents is critical for a smooth progress toward project completion as their research efforts become visible and tangible.

Throughout the semester, learners need to be guided to find direction and develop problem-solving skills. The various steps of the learning process help each learner to constitute a portfolio of documents that describe a learning trajectory, presenting a growth in terms of understanding of knowledge and understanding of self and other. Portfolios are particularly adapted both to this kind of learning environment and the culture-learning objective for the following reasons (see, for an excellent discussion of culture portfolios in FL learning, Abrams, Byrd, Boovy, and Möhring, 2006):

1. Portfolios are long-term, process-oriented projects. Applying this to teaching culture, one can easily envision semester-long projects that are thematically coherent and get at cultural information from several angles and perspectives.
2. Portfolios use multiple sources for information. Applying this to teaching culture, one can cross-reference literature, movies, journalistic materials as multiple sources of information. Even better, in a telecollaborative project one can really gain insights into current perspectives of young people.
3. Portfolios are learner-centered. Learning culture can only be situated in the learner, or, rather, within the learner in relation to his/her own culture and the foreign culture. It has to go through the learner constructing meaning for himself/herself, adopting his/her own transcultural stance.
4. Portfolios are inquiry-based. Learning culture is always inquiry-based. It allows learners to develop analytic skills, critical thinking, and research skills, such as observation and interview.
5. Portfolios demonstrate growth of understanding.

In these portfolios, learners include such documents as their journals, field notes, e-mail correspondence, project proposal, and so on. To these I was able to add interviews, excerpts from online interaction, successive versions of the final project, and so on. In other words, through their collaborative efforts, as well as the amount and varied nature of documents that they produce, learners are able to project themselves into the learning environment, foster the cohesion of the group, and create a trace of their learning trajectory. These documents and constant dialogue with my teaching partner also allow me to monitor, guide, and facilitate the collaborative learning process.

Culture learning: The assessment process

Keeping in mind the learning objectives – both (trans)cultural exploration and becoming a better learner – assessment has to reflect the nature of the learning environment. That is to say, learners have to reflect on their own work and practices as much as I had to assess the quality of their work and the adequacy of the process.

Learners are also better able to assess their work and the learning process than is their teacher. This (self)evaluation is based on several criteria:

1. establishing a convincing chain of evidence to subtend the transition from data to discussion and conclusions;
2. verifying that the questionnaires or interview questions (when applicable) or the document analyses (when applicable) are aligned with the research questions;
3. addressing the issue of why the research methodology is appropriate for this particular project;
4. explicitly addressing the issue of researcher effect or bias;
5. assessing the quality of the data used;
6. showing evidence of data triangulation (e.g. between documents and research effort);
7. demonstrating self-reflective practice.

In other words, students are asked to reflect on whether they have gained a better understanding of French (and American) culture(s). They also have to reflect on whether they have gained competency in being more effective transcultural learners, communicators, or individuals.

Since the emphasis is on process and trajectory in this class, driven by cultural exploration and learning, the assessment of learners' progress is designed, ideally, to mirror that emphasis. Thus, although I have used culture questionnaires to try to measure quantitatively a shift in attitude toward culture (both culture-general – e.g. the intercultural sensitivity inventory developed by Bennett, 1986, 1993 – and culture-specific questionnaires – e.g. a questionnaire on attitude toward French culture) over the course of the semester, both of these types of instruments seem highly problematic, because they are either too general or too static, or both. In addition, ideally, one would also want to attempt to assess attitudes toward media and technology, as well as culture of use (see Thorne, 2003) at the risk of making the assessment procedures rather heavy. This is why, in addition to these quantitative measures, I have increasingly preferred a wide array of qualitative materials grouped in the learners' portfolio. These materials, which in fact constitute the core of the assessment process, include learners' project proposals, their final projects, their journals, and individual interviews I conduct over the course of the semester, and particularly at the end of the semester. These two data clusters are evaluated using the same qualitative framework, looking to establish a convincing chain of evidence for (culture) learning and growth of understanding. Such an intricate assessment framework makes it daunting for foreign language teachers who are not exactly sure how the integration of culture and language in their teaching should take place. It is undeniable that professional training in this area ought to be made available for teachers (see Sercu, 2005, for a discussion of the

ambiguous relationship between foreign language teachers and culture teaching; see also Byram and Risager, 1999).

How, then, do I approach assessment along these modalities? In the portfolios that I collected, I looked for evidence of the indicators mentioned by Garrison et al. (2000) to evaluate the quality and depth of the educational experience. I also look for evidence of culture learning to see if there are marks of a shift in perspective, intellectual posture, way of thinking vis-à-vis French and American cultures taken both separately, as well as inasmuch as they are in relationship/tension with each other. This dovetails with the four-cluster model proposed by Spencer-Oatey and Stadler (2009) as constitutive of the global people competency framework.

What I am ultimately looking for, in these projects and in these documents, is not so much an absolute, objective, unequivocal truth but, rather, evidence of emergent negotiated meaning, negotiated truth, which Jean-François Lyotard (1979), in *the Postmodern Condition*, identifies as the only valid truth in our fragmented reality. Culture, he writes, is the totality of names/nouns (“les noms” in French, which can be both nouns and names) and the narratives attached to them. In a world where the modernist epistemology of meta-narratives has been displaced, scientific meta-narratives can no longer be trusted. Science has no more legitimate claim on truth than other, more local, forms of discourse. Consequently, knowledge is subordinate to the relationship between language and reality, and, like culture, becomes a discursive construct. This linguistic, or rather, discursive nature of knowledge brings me back to the discursive nature of culture. Knowledge, thus, emerges from attaining some form of consensus, which can be eminently cultural. In this sense, belonging to a culture means being able to recognize this consensus and preserving the known – even challenging it, since the consensus is itself a dynamic equilibrium. Establishing a consensus across cultures could be a first step toward intercultural or transcultural learning, as it would be challenging the existing consensus and making room for the unknown. The idea, here, is to establish the production of knowledge as paralogy, as marginal discourses that will bring to existence other ways to see, engage, and understand the world, to reach a new consensus only to displace it later. From there emerges the conclusion that, if learners display evidence, through their trajectory within an ELC, that they have been able to create a community to the end of achieving better cultural and transcultural understanding, then such learning environments constitute a means to reinforce learners’ sensitivity to difference rather than a bland uniformization of society or a dangerous instrument of social control.

Conclusion

Dare I hope that through the opportunities that such a learning environment affords to the learners, they are on their way to becoming critical humanists, questioning their values, capable of conciliating the nuances of the richness of cultural diversity and the necessity of universals (Todorov, 1989)? In *Nous et les Autres: La réflexion française sur la diversité humaine*, Todorov points out that it is only through other cultures that one will be able to judge oneself and find who one truly is. On September 26, 2004, European Day of Languages, Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe said in a discourse: “Learning another language opens the windows of our minds. Language learning is a

powerful tool for building tolerant, peaceful and inclusive multicultural societies. The experience of learning a new language helps to develop openness to other cultures and acceptance of different ways of life and beliefs. It raises awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and promotes tolerance of people with a different lifestyle.” Beyond the problematic use of “tolerant society” (see below), at the core of this sentence is the idea of language as a community-building tool and language at the heart of culture. Hence, language learning, as culture learning, as embodied in such a telecollaborative project, becomes this means to create a common space, which exists transnationally and transculturally. Will learners, then, be able to go beyond tolerance – revisiting here the notion of tolerance – into a more constructive relationship to alterity? Ricœur (1997) argues that tolerance bears in itself the potential to negate the condition of possibility of a true dialogue between cultures, because tolerance, at best, breeds indifference². What Ricœur proposes in place of tolerance is the process of co-foundation, whereby members of various cultures recognize differences as irreducible, and yet also recognize that members of the other cultures have a voice in the community-building process. This is what is truly at stake in culture pedagogy today. In foreign language classes, and especially in an ELC setting, students are confronted with alterity, with the notion of the foreign and the foreigner, which Derrida (1997) calls “la question de l'étranger.” Derrida also rejects the notion of tolerance to which he much prefers that of hospitality³. I would like to conclude with that as a new posture for culture learning. This is why, to the term “target culture”, I prefer to use the terms “culture hôte” (which in French presents the double advantage of being both the “host culture” and the “guest culture”). Thus, culture learning would be a gesture of mutual invitation.

² Unless, perhaps, one were to go back to Voltaire's (1764) idea of tolerance, which is a mutual proposition of forgiveness for one's own weaknesses, imperfections, and fallibility).

³ I mean here both absolute and conditional hospitality. Derrida states that the condition of possibility of hospitality being predicated on the host's knowledge that he or she is safe or protected and that his or her “home” (le chez-soi) is safe as well. This naturally takes a new meaning when the encounter takes place online, but it is important that the participants be aware of the potential “violence” that they can commit even in such environments. I am not talking about physical violence here, of course, but rather the possibility to offend partners deeply by attacking the core of their value system, i.e. their cultural values.

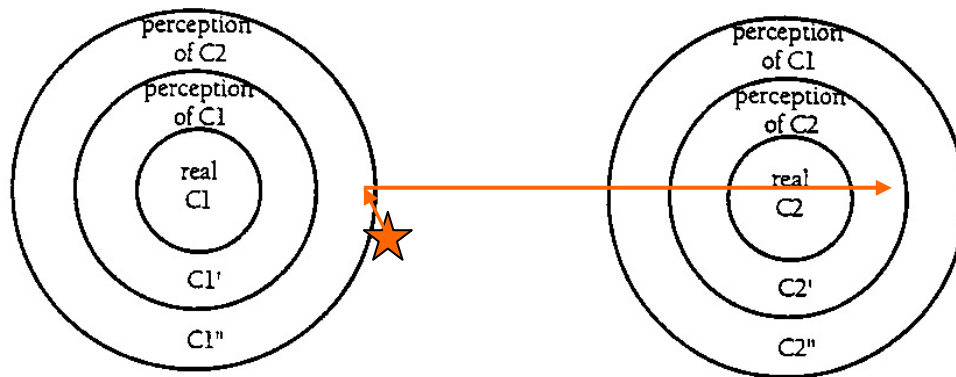
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Appendix A: Kramsch's Cultural Aggregates



- C1 = Native culture as it really is.
 C2 = Target culture the way it really is.
 C1' = C1 perception of self (e.g. the way American people perceive their own culture).
 C1'' = C1 perception of others (e.g. the way French people perceive American culture).
 C2' = C2 perception of self (e.g. the way French people perceive French culture).
 C2'' = C2 perception of others (e.g. the way American people perceive French culture).

Appendix B: The Story of Country Blue

When foreign students come to study at the University of Tennessee, the Center for International Education at the university presents them with a story, paraphrased as follows, to help them understand and deal with their new culture.

“People from a country called Blue normally wear blue clothes, blue hats, and blue sunglasses. Houses are blue and so are the cars and streets. Country Blue borders country Yellow where people wear yellow clothes, yellow hats, and yellow sunglasses. Houses as well as cars and streets are yellow in country Yellow. These two countries are internally peaceful, but have conflicts with each other. They view the customs and policies of the other country as bizarre and evil. One day, a diplomat from Blue decided to visit Yellow, learn about their customs and traditions, and write an extensive article to his fellow Blue citizens explaining how people in Yellow view the world. He was convinced that they were not evil, they just saw the world in a different way. Therefore, the Blue diplomat put on yellow clothes, a yellow hat, and yellow sunglasses. After three months living in Yellow, the Blue diplomat returned to his country and reported that the citizens in Yellow were not bad, bizarre, or stupid. His article claimed that in country Yellow, life was actually very nice and green!”