

CRITERIA FOR COURSEBOOK EVALUATION IN VIEW OF EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

ABSTRACT: This chapter deals with the design and evaluation of materials for foreign language instruction, with a special attention paid to commercial coursebooks for learning English. The author focuses particularly on the effective development of Intercultural Communicative Competence, viewed as a more encompassing concept than an acceptable, communicative use of linguistic resources, but also including a certain psychological stance to others, e.g. motivation to interact with a foreigner, open-mindedness, and some intuitive or trained knowledge of shared cultural assumptions, common themes, values, norms of interaction characteristic of the culture a foreign interlocutor represents. She proceeds from the theoretical ruminations on the nature of the title competence to an overview of existing criteria for material evaluation in view of this competence to finally summarize the paper with her own evaluation checklist applied to a comparative evaluation of two coursebooks.

1. Introduction

Basically, intercultural communication occurs when representatives of two cultures take part in communication. To make the communication successful, they need to achieve an appropriate level of linguistic proficiency as well as they have to be aware of various cultural aspects involved in such an act of communication. Intercultural communication may occur not only between representatives of different national or ethnic groups but also within a national group, which shares the same language and culture, as interculturality involves crossing “group boundaries of various sorts: national, geographical, ethnic, occupational, class or gender” (Kramsch, 1998: 201). Naturally, intercultural communication implies that in order to operate successfully in contacts with representatives of other cultures, speakers should possess intercultural competence(s).

2. Intercultural competence

Intercultural Competence (IC) stands for behavioral aspects of communication and studies the degree to which a person's behavior helps or disturbs intercultural interactions. The notion comprises spoken and unspoken dimensions like gestures, tone of voice, showing respect or disrespect towards others (Graf, 2004: 202). IC constitutes a part of the overall communicative competence which is a concept attempting to explain the underlying abilities that a language user must take advantage of in order to form appropriate utterances in their interlanguage, including one's knowledge of grammar and the rules of appropriate language use in any given social context. This is so as communicative competence constitutes an umbrella term for knowledge and skills which enable us to communicate effectively and appropriately.

Intercultural Competence draws from the resources of the linguistic, sociolinguistic and strategic competences and can be seen as a combination of five elements: attitudes, knowledge, skills, learning to learn abilities and critical awareness, called *savoirs*. According to Byram *et al.* (2001: 5–7), it includes knowledge, skills and attitudes “complemented by the values one holds because of one's belonging to a number of social groups, values which are part of one's belonging to a given society”. According to Byram (1997: 50–54), IC includes:

- ❑ Attitudes of curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own. In other words, an intercultural speaker should be eager to follow the principles of critical cultural relativism when judging the behavior, values and beliefs displayed by others.
- ❑ Knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general process of societal and individual interaction. To perform successfully, one needs to possess knowledge of “how social groups and social identities function”, including their products and practices, in one's own and in one's interlocutor's culture.
- ❑ Skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own. As an intercultural encounter may cause misunderstanding, a successful speaker needs to be able to discern sources of misunderstandings and resolve them. That entails the skill of comparison. Byram *et al.* (2001: 6) notice, “By putting ideas, events, documents side by side and seeing how each might look from the other perspective, intercultural speakers/mediators can see how people might understand what is said or written or done by someone with a different social identity”.
- ❑ Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge,

attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction. This is a crucial factor. Any act of communication may require from us to be an acute and agile observer, in intercultural contacts that becomes even more appreciable and demanded. When in contact with representatives of other cultures, we namely need to be able to acquire new knowledge as the interaction proceeds and we need to be able to integrate with and relate it to what we already know. Byram *et al.* (*ibidem*) mean here the ability to “ask people from other cultures about their beliefs, values and behaviors; these can be difficult to explain because they are often unconscious”.

- ❑ Critical cultural awareness/political education: ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries. Upon meeting representatives of other cultures, speakers without intercultural competence usually distance themselves from the other, or simply reject as valid or worthy of further analysis, behavior, ideas or products that are untypical for them. This is a standard reaction and in order to become skillful in intercultural interaction, speakers need to acquire the awareness of their own values and how these influence their interpretation of other people’s views.

Some other, yet convergent, perspective on the concept of Intercultural Communication Competence is put by Arasaratnam (IS 1 and 2) and Arasaratnam, Doerfel (2005), who identify five qualities of a competent intercultural communicator:

- ❑ Motivation – motivated by interest in finding out more about other cultures.
- ❑ Intercultural experience/training – prior exposure to culturally different others, formal training in intercultural communication, which enables such a person to learn from past experiences and utilizing this knowledge to improve future behavior.
- ❑ Empathy – sensitivity to others’ perspectives, awareness of others’ needs, which enables this person adapting his or her behavior appropriately to the situation.
- ❑ Global attitude – an inclusive, positive attitude towards people of other cultures, not threatened by the existence of multiple worldviews, not ethnocentric.
- ❑ Ability to listen well and pay attention – a cognitively and behaviorally involved conversationalist.

Byram’s as well as Arasaratnam and Doerfel’s models allow us to claim that experience in intercultural encounters is not the sole factor in our intercultural success as those who come from culturally diverse communities are not necessarily more competent in intercultural communication when compared to those who come from culturally homogeneous communities.

This is so as, apart from experience related knowledge, one needs to develop a certain set of values, skills and traits of character or personality to operate effectively in intercultural encounters. One of those which should be highlighted is adopting a positive, open-minded and mindful attitude toward cross-cultural differences.

3. Intercultural Competence versus Intercultural Communicative Competence

Scholarly literature of the field differentiates between Intercultural Competence and **Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)**¹. Naturally, they are interrelated and draw from the same pool of resources. However, the fundamental difference between these two lies in the professional and general life experience of the speakers and the language they communicate in. The former of the concepts namely describes the competence of individuals who upon drawing from their “knowledge about intercultural communication, their interest in the otherness and their skills in interpreting, relating and discovering” interact in their native language with representatives of other cultures or countries (Byram, 1997: 70–71). Hence, the linguistic medium with which the interlocutors communicate is the fundamental difference between the two concepts, as Intercultural Communicative Competence is a tool necessary for those who “interact with people from another culture or country in a foreign language” (*ibidem*). In ICC the ability to use the foreign language appropriately comes to the fore accompanied by a solid knowledge of another culture. Following Byram (*ibidem*), examples of the two competencies could be:

Intercultural Competence – the ability to interpret a translated document from another culture, which does not require knowledge of the language but does involve the skills of interpreting and relating, some knowledge about the other culture, and attitudes of interest and engagement.

Intercultural Communicative Competence – characteristic of a foreign language learner with personal experience of interaction with people of another culture involving the use of a foreign language.

Intercultural Communicative Competence, viewed from this perspective, encompasses not only Dell Hymes’s (1972) acceptability criteria and built on them Canale and Swain’s (1980) idea of communicative competence. It is a broader concept highlighting the importance of psychological features, e.g. motivation to interact with a foreigner, open-mindedness, and some intuitive or trained knowledge of shared cultural assumptions, common themes, values, norms of interaction characteristic of the culture the for-

¹ Some researchers call it Intercultural Communication Competence, e.g. Asaratnam.

eigner represents. In this chapter stress is mostly laid on the development of this competence as it is assumed that language lessons are devoted to honing target language skills and resources rather than those in the native language of learners. However, it must be mentioned that any increase in students' ICC correlates positively with strengthening their skills and abilities within Intercultural Competence, i.e. in their native language, thanks to their acquisition of empathetic and global thinking, open-mindedness, language and culture awareness, etc.

4. Intercultural education

Sercu (2006: 57–58) specifies the knowledge, skills, attitudes and traits that a foreign language teacher should possess to be able to teach intercultural competences. Concerning knowledge, teachers should be sufficiently familiar with the culture specific and culture general of the country they teach and contact it frequently on various occasions. This also includes knowledge of the self and of the other and the possibility of developing an insight into the way culture affects language and communication. In addition, they should know how to address the stereotypes of foreign or second language students. Byram *et al.* (2002: 27) defines stereotyping as labelling or categorising particular groups of people, usually in a negative way, according to preconceived ideas or broad generalisations about them – and then assuming that all members of that group think and behave identically. Stereotypes can undermine our sense of who we are by suggesting that how we look or speak determines how we act.

Students should be sensitized to the fact that any stereotype, despite its value, will always remain an oversimplification or a blanket assumption stemming from strong ethnocentrism. And humans are individual beings whose interactional performance depends on a whole array of factors, cultural traits constituting only one of many.

As regards skills, language teachers should know how to employ teaching techniques that promote the acquisition of the five *savoirs*. Moreover, teachers should know their own culture well and be able to explain similarities and differences between cultures. Furthermore, teachers should help learners find the relationship between their own culture and foreign ones, compare cultures and identify with foreign cultures' points of view leading thus to an increased cultural- and self-awareness. In addition, skilful teachers should also be open to experiential approaches to their teaching of language and culture. In a nutshell, learning a foreign language and culture is not required to involve the deepest form of acculturation, emulated at all costs. Quite the contrary, with the contemporary acceptance of “world Englishes” and appearance of English as *lingua franca*, the myth of the native speaker model has been disassembled.

With respect to attitudes, teachers should be favorably inclined to the integration of intercultural competences into a foreign language instruction. They also should be willing to actually work towards achieving that goal. To achieve that, the objectives of foreign language education in terms of both language learning and intercultural competence acquisition should be defined. First and foremost, when designing the learning process, teachers should take into consideration their learners' views and attitudes regarding foreign cultures, and depart from these views and attitudes. Next, they should be able to develop in their students a positive predisposition and awareness of the importance of valuing oneself and others. In practical terms these goals can be achieved by, for example, incorporating adapted intercultural literary texts in a language classroom (Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, 2012).

Finally, we need to mention one of the hot spots in the debate on the relation between students' native culture and the target language culture. In most cases teachers can strike a balance by showing students that the cultures should not be viewed as "oppositional or mutually exclusive, but rather somewhat as hues and colors covering a wide spectrum" (Brown, 2007: 190). Additionally, students should be sensitized to the fact mentioned above that often the shape and effect of one's interaction in a foreign language will depend on a multitude of factors, culture being only one of them. And contemporary research on intercultural communication puts a special emphasis on the interpersonal character of such exchanges. In ideal conditions that should enable learners a constant shaping of their identity, constructing a picture of the world, positioning themselves in the dynamic reality. That is why teachers are encouraged to highlight the importance of the interpersonal skills such as the ability to pay attention and listen, one's positive attitude to the interlocutor and sensitivity to nonverbal clues and contextual clues. Partly this is the reason why today's research considers pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic factors in effective foreign language communication as critically important, e.g. Rose and Kasper (2001). Without depreciation of linguistic and interpersonal skills, context would be seen as the real key to giving meaning to authentic, unrehearsed, time-constrained interaction in real settings.

Such 'well-equipped' teachers are able to meet the requirements of intercultural education which Komorowska (2006: 66) lists as:

- providing the learner with socio-cultural knowledge of other cultures, i.e. norms, values, life and communication styles,
- raising the learner's awareness of the influence of his/her own culture on his/her perception of self and others,
- raising the awareness of differences and of stereotypes,
- developing skills to observe, interpret, sustain judgment and cooperate with others in spite of a possible lack of acceptance,
- practicing strategies of behavior and communication appropriate in a given context.

It can be concluded from the above discussion that teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence should constitute an important element of language teaching, and one of the pillars of the so oriented teaching is the coursebook. In other words, to help learners become interculturally competent, teachers should select materials and learning tasks with an appropriate content as well as consider to what extent these materials can serve the purpose of promoting the acquisition of intercultural competences. This also correlates with the findings from the case studies in Byram *et al.*'s (1991: 351) research project, which enabled, on the basis of classroom observations and interviews, formulating the following conclusions concerning coursebooks, in this particular instance for teaching French.

As far as cultural information is concerned, in all the classes observed, the textbook provided a potential core of information and in fact teachers relied on the textbook for cultural information a great deal. Building on this core of information, teachers variously used their personal experience and other materials, or artefacts from France. However, on the whole these were again determined by the textbook. Only the topics included in the textbook were covered and other information was integrated with the topic currently being studied from the textbook.

Since the primary means for teachers to present their students with cultural information/knowledge is through the medium of the textbook, then the book to be employed needs to be analyzed thoroughly to see whether the presentation and teaching of the target culture is balanced and fulfils the aims of language teaching targeting at effective development of Intercultural Communicative Competence.

5. Coursebook evaluation

Before we start the discussion of the role of the coursebook in the process of ICC acquisition, it should be clearly stated that teaching languages on no account should follow a single coursebook blindly or uncritically. However, with such a varied output of language teaching materials on the publishing market, teachers can select sources that may assist their classroom work in a valuable and effective way. In order to choose well, they conduct an out-of-class judgment as how well a new book will work in class, i.e. its teaching/learning value.

Then there is the question of the difference between evaluation and assessment. Assessment is traditionally defined as giving grades for learner performance which would also include ongoing, formative error treatment and feedback on "specific bits of learner-produced language with the aim of bringing about improvement" (Ur, 2003: 244). In a wider sense, assessment would mean assigning values to work results or efficiency. Distinct from

this is evaluation which is mostly summative in character and which relies on an in-depth analysis of a totality of performance, process or material. Evaluation often aims at finding strong and weak points of the examined phenomenon and may form the basis for introduction of corrections or changes. Generally, teachers conduct evaluation of their own performance and materials used to see how effective their teaching is.

The present chapter's main aim is to gather ideas which could enable teachers to judge whether a language coursebook they use stimulates the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence so it deals with evaluation and not assessment of educational materials. The discussed matters can also facilitate a correct selection of a coursebook before classes begin.

Cunningsworth (1995: 1–2) suggests two similar approaches to the evaluation of a coursebook. To be able to see what the various features of a given coursebook are, we can form a general impression of it. It is possible by a quick look through a book, and seeing the visuals and, for instance, the layout variables. This impressionistic overview gives teachers a general introduction to the material, but it will not identify any significant values or vices of a particular coursebook (*ibidem*). The other approach is to conduct an in-depth evaluation by examining how specific items and aspects of language are dealt with (*ibidem*). For the right choice of a coursebook a combination of these two approaches is practical and recommendable. This is so as the in-depth approach helps us to seek out information about the material together with our planned expectations. The impressionistic approach is better for selecting language items that are of our interest.

There are many aspects that can serve as major evaluation areas. Pedagogical factors to be considered include suitability for a particular age or proficiency group, methodology followed, types, numbers and variety of exercises on offer, language content, skills or vocabulary development, opportunities for communicative abilities, personal involvement generated, opportunities for student autonomy development, presence or absence of different learning strategies, or suitability for state or other official exams preparation. For more information on evaluation criteria see Littlejohn (1998), Sheldon (1988) or Ellis (1997). Naturally, a language course material can be assessed also in terms of its effectiveness of developing students' Intercultural Communicative Competence. In reality the usual way of doing it is to get teachers to analyze a coursebook against a list of evaluative criteria (Hinkel, 1999: 1).

6. Coursebook evaluation and ICC development

Some of the already published checklists present evaluation of cultural content as a summative process intended to answer the question, "In what ways do the materials involve your learners' values, attitudes and feelings?"

(Breen and Candlin, 1987 in Hinkel, 1999: 1). Some other checklists draw teachers' attention to possible stereotypes of races and cultures that are present in coursebooks. For example, they check how the sexes are presented or how different races are portrayed (Littlejohn, 1998: 190–216). Others alert teachers to possible varieties of target cultures but, in fact, they mention only Great Britain or the United States. The portrayal of cultural variation is very important in order not to let students see only a unified, monolithic culture (Hinkel, 1999: 201). In fact, inter- and intra-cultural variation needs to be represented by a good coursebook as well.

Cunningsworth (1984) puts forward, the cultural context that accompanies linguistic content should help students perceive and properly categorize social situations they might find themselves in, which runs in agreement with Dell Hymes's concept of speaking to be socially accepted and understood. In his later publication Cunningsworth (1995: 90–93) encourages teachers to ask whether the social and cultural contexts are interpretable by learners. He further argues that language textbooks are bound to show some social and cultural values (*ibidem*: 90). This is an especially tricky task as these are often not explicit, unconscious and unstated. Any detailed evaluation should therefore put emphasis on detection and examination of such unstated values.

A coursebook intended to develop, at least to some extent, language learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence should include activities requiring a critical analysis of interactions between representatives of different cultures that for some reason resulted in communication failure or misunderstanding. Such interactions are known under the term critical incidents. Their pedagogical value is high, as they allow learners to notice and reflect on culturally determined patterns of behavior. Thus, they lead to the act of confrontation between the students' often unconscious schemata, norms and values, which they acquired by the processes of socialization in their native culture, with the same elements characteristic of the target language culture. Finally, critical incident analysis frequently leads students to the conclusion that interaction strategies that are effective and socially acceptable in one cultural environment may fail or cause misunderstandings in some other. One way of remedying that could be training intercultural skills and know-how which according to *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFRL) (2001: 104) include:

- ❑ The ability to bring the culture of origin and the foreign culture into relation with each other.
- ❑ Cultural sensitivity and ability to identify and use a variety of strategies for contact with those from other cultures.
- ❑ The capacity to fulfill the role of cultural intermediary between one's own culture and the foreign culture and to deal effectively with intercultural misunderstanding and conflict situations.
- ❑ The ability to overcome stereotyped relationships.

Furthermore, when evaluating a textbook in terms of its intercultural suitability, it is worth taking into account whether it stresses the subtle ways in which vocabulary items can be culturally significant. To illustrate, a good coursebook draws students' attention to the fact that rules for interactional language may differ between particular countries. As to the Polish and English differences, Poles more eagerly involve in interactional language than, for example, the British do, e.g. Poles bid farewell in a long set of turns where each of Polish interlocutors involved would repeat a couple of times the same greetings (*Cześć, Do zobaczenia, No to na razie, Pa*) whereas the British would normally content themselves with a cursory *bye*. However, it is commonly observed that non-native users of languages transform the learnt expressions or add extra ones from their local languages to fulfill their needs and meet social interaction patterns they acquired. An example from the variety of English used in Cameroon can serve as a very good example (Bobda, 2008: 103–128). Cameroonians implant into English the word *Ashia*, which is a greeting used as an expression of sympathy for somebody in trouble or physical or mental discomfort, e.g. death of a close person, sickness. English lacks such an expression so the gap is filled with this dialectal form.

Bobda (*ibidem*: 110–112) also highlights the significance of varying degrees of formality resulting from varying class-consciousness that is typical of particular cultures. And again Cameroonian and Polish speakers of English share much in this respect in contrast to the native English. Cameroonians and Poles are namely extremely class-conscious, which motivates the existence and frequent use of honorifics (*Professor, Doctor, Rector, Chief, General*), not only in professional settings, but also in private interactions outside workplaces. Furthermore, practices typical of Polish and Cameroonian dialects that are transferred into English are deliberate upgrading of positions, i.e. referring to a vice dean with the honorific *Dean*, and allowing holders of certain positions to keep their titles for life, e.g. a former minister will continue to be called so after a dismissal. There is nothing offensive in these practices but non-native speakers of the English language should at least realize the differences. Finally, language learners should be sensitized to shifts in word meaning, e.g. the word *change* in English and to a great measure in Polish connotes something positive. This is not the same for Cameroonians, who associate *change* with political changes that took place in their country which in many cases entailed corruption, poverty and other associated ills (*ibidem*: 117).

Following the ideas of Caruna (2008: 331–345), who put forward suggestions concerning preparation of beneficial materials for teaching host adults interacting with immigrants, we may formulate the following suggestions concerning tasks that should be included in a coursebook that intends to develop learners' intercultural competences:

- Tasks that introduce and encourage practice in the cultural and communicative context of the host country, in the form of texts

with pictures, e.g. from tourist brochures, guidebooks, informative web-sites.

- Tasks requiring students to address the use of gestures and posture, the use of tone of voice, the physical settings.
- Recordings or transcripts of interactions between native speakers, possibly in real-life situations, e.g. a telephone call, a conversation in a public place, request for information.
- Pair-work and group-work, including the use of information gap.
- Role-plays.
- Forms, documents to be filled in.

7. Practical implications for coursebook evaluation

In order to decide whether a particular language coursebook renders the development of ICC feasible, it is worth checking it against a list of criteria compiled for that purpose.

Hinkel (1999: 202) following Byram (1993) establishes a checklist of evaluation criteria which focus on culture content in coursebooks. They can be transformed into questions of the following type taking the first of the below mentioned points into account: How does the coursebook under assessment shape students' awareness of different social identities and groups within the target language community. Does it intend to achieve it by a) presenting different social classes? b) portraying ways of shaping regional identity of speakers of the language? C) by presenting life, customs, values of ethnic minorities living in the target language community?

Focus on cultural content (Byram, 1993 in Hinkel, 1999: 203)

- Social identity and social groups (social class, regional identity, ethnic minorities).
- Social interaction (differing levels of formality; as outsider and insider).
- Belief and behavior (moral, religious beliefs; daily routines).
- Socialization and the life cycle (families, schools, employment, rites of passage).
- Social and political institutions (state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government).
- National history (historical and contemporary events seen as markers of national identity).
- National geography (geographic factors seen as significant by members).
- Stereotypes and national identity (what is "typical", symbols of national stereotypes).

Hinkel (1999: 203) also cites Huhn's (1978) useful criteria for evaluating the treatment of the target language community culture in language textbooks. These are as follows:

Does the coursebook

- give factually accurate and up-to-date information?
- avoid (or relativize) stereotypes by raising awareness?
- present a realistic picture?
- remain free from ideological tendencies?
- present phenomena in context rather than as isolated facts?
- explicitly relate historical material to contemporary society?
- make it clear how personalities are products of their age?

Similarly Cunningsworth (1995: 90–92; 1984: 79) compiles a list of questions concerned with social and cultural values present in coursebooks. These are:

- Are there social and cultural contexts in the coursebook comprehensible to the learners? If the material is culture-specific, will this be acceptable to the learners?
- Are women given equal prominence to men in all aspects of the coursebook?
- Can learners interpret the relationships, behaviour, intentions, etc. of the characters portrayed in the coursebook?
- What physical and character attributes are women given?
- What do we learn about inner lives of the characters?
- What professional and social roles are women shown as occupying?
- To what extent is the language of feelings depicted?
- Do the coursebook characters exist in some kind of social setting, within a social network?
- Are social relationships portrayed realistically?
- Is the cultural context included only to provide a setting for the content of the material?
- Does the material include aspects of British and/or American culture so that the language learning is seen as a vehicle for cultural understanding?

Yet another model developed so far for evaluating the cultural content in foreign language teaching textbooks is the one compiled by Risager (1991: 181–192). The model originated from the analysis of realistic prose and was adapted by Andersen and Risager (after their 1978 study of Danish textbooks for teaching French) to the actual content of textbooks. The model consists of the following four major categories.

Risager's analytical categories of textbook cultural reference (1991: 181–182)

the micro level

phenomena of social and cultural anthropology,
the social and geographical definition of characters,
material environment,

situations of interaction,
interaction and subjectivity of the characters: feelings, attitudes, values, and
perceived problems.

the macro level

social, political, and historical matters,
broad social facts about contemporary society (geographical, economic,
political, etc.),
broad socio-political problems (unemployment, pollution, etc.),
historical background.

international and intercultural issues

comparison between a foreign country and the pupils' own,
mutual representations, images, stereotypes,
mutual relations: cultural power and dominance, co-operation and conflict.

Point of view and style of the author(s)

expression of attitudes towards the target community or culture.

As a way of summary, the present author would like to draw her own list of criteria that could serve as a practical checklist when performing a coursebook evaluation in terms of the feasibility of students' development of Intercultural Communicative Competence. The list draws heavily from her personal experience as an intercultural researcher and the English language instructor and is a proposal drafted for Polish teachers of English. It also includes some of the assumptions put forward by Risager (1991), Komorowska (2006), Cunningsworth (1984) and Brown (2007).

- Does the textbook represent the reality about the target culture or its interpretation tinted by the coursebook author's worldview, knowledge or cultural values?
- Does the textbook present the target culture as a place of idyll or conflict? Are social, economic problems of the target community portrayed? Do the coursebook characters exist in real social settings?
- Does the coursebook present a biased or unbiased perspective on the target culture? In other words, is the cultural information presented with evaluative comments, i.e. positive or negative phenomenon? Or is it presented through comparison without such comments?
- Does the coursebook refrain from any possible devaluating of learners' native culture or language?
- What subjects does the textbook cover? Are these specific to the target culture? Are there any topics that might not be culturally suitable for learners in the class?
- Does the textbook include a variety of cultures or just specific ones, e.g. British or American culture in a textbook for the English language learning?

- Are the conversations in the coursebook authentic and transferable to everyday life?
- What cultural and social groups are represented? Is this an adequate coverage of a variety of people or is this limited to a chosen people? Are there present any stereotypes about the portrayed people?
- Are there any illustrations? If so, are these appropriate to the learners' native culture? Would additional information be necessary to explain them or are they self-explanatory? Are they up to date?
- Is the target culture presented through the four skills? Are the skills practiced to an equal measure? Here attention should be paid to writing skills as they are frequently neglected.
- What types of activities based on content concerning the target culture are there in the coursebook? Does the coursebook contain activities in which students have to cope with communication problems that might arise in cases of intercultural contact, i.e. intercultural incidents? Are they asked to find solutions to problems which may appear when representatives of different cultures come in contact?
- Are students encouraged to interact with the use of functional language, e.g. asking for information, seeking advice or clarification? Are variations in politeness and formality presented and practiced.
- Does the textbook only pass on cultural knowledge or does it intend to develop students' intercultural awareness? What are learners supposed to do with the cultural information, included i.e. whether an active use or awareness of it are encouraged for a better understanding of the target and students' own culture?
- Is enough attention paid in the coursebook to culturally determined nonverbal, verbal and paraverbal issues?
- Are there any lessons, parts of the coursebook, concerning specifically the target culture, e.g. culture zones?
- Is there an explanation given to the cultural content so that teachers are familiar enough with it to portray it effectively in the classroom? Is it useful for less experienced teachers? Is any additional cultural information provided in the teacher's book?
- Does the coursebook provide any extra components, apart from a course book package, presenting the target culture, e.g. DVD, readers, website?

8. An exemplary evaluation

Some of the above presented criteria were applied to the evaluation of officially approved coursebooks for teaching the English language in Polish public schools. The evaluation was carried out within a project conducted by the present author with her MA students of English studies in years

2007–2009. Results for two coursebooks *Sky 1* (2005) and *Sky 2* (2005) are briefly summarized below from reports presented by Kołpaczewska (2008) and Buryta (2008). However, before this takes place it needs to be highlighted that the coursebook evaluation conducted for the purpose of the present writing, or in fact any coursebook evaluation, is not a direct evaluation of the factual teaching or learning that takes place in the classroom. In fact, successful teaching can do without a coursebook and the same applies to effective development of Intercultural Communicative Competence but a well written course material may bring better chances of its fostering.

The textbooks in scope present a sufficient material for a systematic development of intercultural skills for children attending primary school. Both coursebooks include units which are specifically devoted to teaching about the target culture and the cultural information included is mostly reliable and realistic, although concerning predominantly British or American society. For example, in *Sky 2* (2005: 84) there is a table with the six most popular, among the, British foreign holiday destinations (Spain, France, the USA, Greece, Italy, and Portugal). The list includes factual and accurate data as for 2005, i.e. the year the textbook was published.

When it comes to the characters appearing in the particular units, there is a balanced proportion of female and male characters, with quite a good representation of the mid-2010s celebrities. However, most of them are of the white background which is a distortion of the reality, taking into account the ethnic composition of today's Great Britain or the USA. In *Sky 1* Indians and Africans are the most frequently represented ethnic groups. There are only two texts in which a boy from Bombay in India and a Black American boy play the leading role. Similarly, in *Sky 2* there are only two characters from other countries (Finland and China) each appearing once.

Although in conversations female and male characters have been allotted more or less the same amount of time in the analyzed publications, the sexes are portrayed very stereotypically. There are two lessons where we can read about a woman working as a shop assistant and two other lessons where women are housewives with babies in their arms and another two standing by their sides. In *Sky 2* the division is slightly less traditional with men portrayed as an inventor, composer, singer, writer, explorer, astronaut, teacher, waiter, actor and women as a film star, scientist, jumbo jet pilot, nurse, teacher, singer, cinema cashier. And in Lesson 2 (2005: 8) there is a photo of Mr Hunt in the kitchen making pasta for dinner and on the next page there is also a drawing of a man who chops carrots.

Both books depict a very positive, almost idyllic picture of the target culture. This applies especially to the picture of the family in the coursebooks. We may call it a little overdrawn: beautiful parents with beautiful children spending a lot of time together walking a dog, watching videos, or playing with a new kitten. In the coursebooks the siblings never fight against one

another. Instead they make a smoothie in the kitchen, where one reads the recipe, and the other two chop and stir (*Sky 2*, 2005: 21). Wajnryb (1996: 291) criticizes such an approach saying that students are not helped by textbooks that “model a world that is safe, clean, harmonious, benevolent, undisturbed, and PG-rated”.

A definite advantage is that the authors of both coursebooks do not reveal their evaluation of the presented information or phenomena. Instead, they provide opportunities for students to formulate their own evaluative statements about the target culture occurrences or facts, e.g. diet. However, what occurred to be a weak point of the materials is that they offer learners few opportunities to cope with communication problems in contact with representatives of the target culture, i.e. to develop ICC. That is coupled with the fact that the number of culturally tinted speaking practice is small. However, learners are often asked to imagine they are someone else in a communicative situation and, for example in *Sky 1*, to answer questions about their school asked by their imaginary friend from the UK or the USA. Another task is to imagine being a waiter in turns with a customer in London. There is also a task in which there is a telephone conversation with an English-speaking friend who is on holiday in an English speaking country. We can also find activities in which children have to write a letter or an e-mail to a friend from other country.

There are many other activities with similar objectives and aims. Nevertheless, the question is if these kinds of activities provide learners with opportunities to cope with communication problems which may appear in contact with a representative of a different culture. The answer is that the chances are faint. Indeed there are some tips given in the *Teacher's Books* (section *Background information*) accompanying the coursebooks about acceptable behavior in contact with the British, e.g. remember that it is not generally regarded as polite in British culture for children to ask adults their age. We also have a note for children to be careful when using the word *wicked*, because traditionally it means “extremely bad” or “evil” but nowadays young people use it to mean “cool”. Probably, these tips are not enough for learners to avoid problems with communication in the foreign language. However, there are some dialogues in the textbook which could be called authentic in the sense that they take place largely in the target context and the interlocutors come from the target culture as well, which, according to Byram (1997), qualify the dialogues as intercultural communicative ones. Finally, it is worth highlighting that the coursebooks include activities designed to develop students' functional language (see the Appendix for an example), which can form a very good ground for future training of pragmatic competence in the foreign language.

As to the criteria qualifying activities as developing intercultural skills and know-how (CEF, 2001: 104), *Sky 2* provides several opportunities for

students to compare the two cultures, for example, when students have to decide whether a list of British school rules is the same as the ones observed in Polish schools, thus they have to bring the two cultures into a relation with each other. Turning to the second point, there are a number of dialogues which make use of authentic language in a variety of situations, e.g. expressing obligation and prohibition, making and responding to invitations, ordering a meal in a restaurant, or asking for and giving directions. As far as the third point is concerned, a close examination reveals that the authors of the coursebook expose learners to intercultural misunderstandings. For instance, from a dialogue about the River Thames (2005: 42) we learn that it is 215 miles long. As this unit of measurement is not used in every country, there is a small box below the dialogue in which it is explained that 1 mile is 1.6 km. Finally, concerning the fourth point, as stated before (see criterion 6), no examples of stereotyping have been identified. Moreover, the books encourages overcoming some common stereotypes, such as women's place is in the kitchen and girls not liking football, by providing photos of Mr Hunt cooking dinner and a girl holding a football and firmly stating that she is mad about this sport. As all the requirements are met, it can be concluded that the textbook develops intercultural skills and know-how, naturally to the degree constrained by the learners' age.

9. Concluding remarks

Intercultural language learning is a significant development from some traditional and current approaches to language learning and teaching. It connects the study of culture to language learning and sees them as integrated and holistic. Liddicoat *et al.* (2002: 37) portray the nature of intercultural language learning as “involving the fusing of language, culture and learning into a single educative approach. It begins with the idea that language, culture and learning are fundamentally interrelated and places this interrelationship at the centre of the learning process”. This not only reformulates what it means to teach a language, but also provides new and richer ways of linking languages to other learning areas. The concepts of “language”, “culture” and “learning” are therefore central to the design of the language curriculum and, importantly, of the curriculum as a whole. Intercultural language learning involves developing with learners an understanding of their own language(s) and culture(s) in relation to an additional language and culture. It is a dialogue that allows for reaching a common ground for negotiation to take place, and where variable points of view are recognized, mediated and accepted.

In other words, intercultural language learning requires students to reflect on the knowledge and assumptions they make about their own culture as well as on those of the target language. They should also reflect on the ways

that languages embody cultures and manifest culturally significant attitudes and behaviors. In fact, to fully and effectively communicate in English in any society, purely linguistic tools must be supplemented by a set of cultural guidelines and include input enabling learners developing their command of sociocultural rules and corresponding L2 forms.

Consequently, to the demands made upon modern coursebooks so far, one more has been recently added. They are namely to become also media for intercultural teaching featuring for example activities that cultivate among learners the respect for cultural diversity and its positive potential. As Brown (2007: 2006) puts forward, teaching should be based on the tenet of “the highest respect for the languages and cultures of our students” and “the preservation of diversity among human beings”.

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Appendix

An example of an activity focusing on functional language (Harris M., Mover D., Sikorzyńska A., 2002: 109)

- 4 Pronunciation Listen to these sentences and notice the underlined words, which are unstressed.
- 1 But first, here's a report on the dance scene in Britain.
 - 2 Britain was certainly not the cool centre of the universe.
 - 3 Pubs closed at eleven o'clock.
 - 4 Everyone went for a take-away Chinese meal.
 - 5 People were just starting to go out to cafés and nightclubs.

Listen again and repeat.

5 Answer these questions.

- 1 Would you like to go clubbing in Britain? Why or why not?
- 2 What British groups or singers do you know about? Which are good for dancing?

6 Listen to two dialogues. What do Malcolm and Andrea get permission for? What do they not get permission for?

Example Malcolm – permission to go to a new club

QUOTE ... UNQUOTE

'I don't want to belong to any club that will accept me as a member.'

Groucho Marx, comedian (1890–1977)



7 Complete the Function File with these words.

would, can't, let (x2), could, OK, you know, excuse me, must, afraid, can, make sure

FUNCTION FILE

Asking for, giving and refusing permission

Informal

A ¹ *You know* there's a new nightclub opening in town.

Is it ² _____ if I go?

B Oh, all right, I'll ³ _____ you go, if you don't come back too late.

A And I was thinking, ⁴ _____ I stay at Pete's house?

B No way! You definitely ⁵ _____ stay at Pete's. If you want to go, you ⁶ _____ be back here by midnight.

Formal

C ⁷ _____, Mr Moore? ⁸ _____ it be all right if I brought you my project next week?

D OK, but ⁹ _____ you give it to me on Monday morning.

C ¹⁰ _____ I do my project with Susan?

D No, I'm ¹¹ _____ you can't. I don't ¹² _____ people to do their final projects with other students.

Listen to Exercise 6 again and check your answers.

Speaking

8 Imagine you want to ask for permission in the situations (1–4) below. Think of good reasons.

You need permission ...	You need to ask ...
1 to miss a test at school	your teacher
2 to go away for the weekend	your parents
3 to organise a party at school	your head teacher
4 to invite a friend to stay at your house in the summer	your parents

Work in pairs. Take turns to ask for permission using the expressions from the Function File above. Act the situations.

9 Look at the Function File below. Translate the sentences into Polish.

FUNCTION FILE

Talking about permission

- 1 My parents let me go out until 12 at the weekends.
- 2 They don't let me play loud music.
- 3 They allow me to have parties in the summer.
- 4 They don't allow me to ride a motorbike.

Write five sentences like those above about your life. Include one sentence that is false. Work in groups. Read out your sentences. The others guess which is false.