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## **A CRITICAL STANCE ON THE APPROACH TO INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN THE COMMON EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE**

Keywords: intercultural competence, the Common European Framework of Reference.

### **ABSTRACT**

In 2001 the Council of Europe recommended the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) with a view to enhancing intercultural education, one of its central goals, in the context of foreign language teaching. Sixteen years later a new proposal of the Framework appeared with the aim to adjust the document to better prepare learners for intercultural communication. The article analyzes the perspectives on intercultural competence (IC) in the CEFR (2001, 2017) and stresses the need for a more consistent and up-to-date approach to the concept.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In 2001 the Council of Europe published the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001), promoting plurilingualism and creating a common basis for language learning qualifications, textbooks, curricula and examinations. In 2017 a new version of the document was released, extending its descriptors and introducing mediation as a key concept for communicative language competences. Despite a few changes the main goal, i.e. building learners' intercultural competence, remains the same.

IC is one of the pillars of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) as it ensures the attitude of openness to linguistic and cultural diversity as well as various expressions of identity in Europe. The Framework (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) strongly emphasizes the role of language learning in developing IC since it assures successful interaction across various linguistic and cultural contexts, serving an intercultural purpose as a consequence. Thus, the document (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) adopts an intercultural perspective and defines the goal of language education as building IC and deeper intercultural understanding through plurilingual communicative competence. This position is even more emphasized in the 2017 version of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2017), which draws heavily on Kramsch's (1993) notion of the third space in its statement of purpose and introduces the concept of a pluricultural space (equated with mediation), defined as "a shared space between and among linguistically and culturally different

interlocutors, i.e. the capacity of dealing with ‘otherness’ to identify similarities and differences to build on known and unknown cultural features, etc. in order to enable communication and collaboration” (Council of Europe 2017: 120). Consequently, rather than focusing on their plurilingual abilities, which are supposed to lead to IC, learners are expected to become cultural mediators whose task is to create a shared space, which is supposed to enhance intercultural communication. Therefore, the 2017 version of the CEFR declares to shift emphasis away from simply “exploiting [...] pluricultural repertoire” (Council of Europe 2001: 83) onto the ability to mediate languages and cultures, which becomes the main goal.

The role of a learner as a social agent is repeatedly referred to in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017), highlighting a reference to a communicative paradigm and an action-based approach. “Internalised by a social agent” and characterized by “internal representations, mechanisms and capacities, the cognitive existence of which can be considered to account for observable behaviour and performance” (Council of Europe 2001: 23), IC (like other types of competence) is intended to link the social and the cognitive. This perspective is further strengthened in the 2017 document, which recognizes “the social nature of language learning and language use, the interaction between the social and the individual in the process of learning” (Council of Europe 2017: 27). Therefore, following the latest findings in intercultural research, the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) promotes a socio-cognitive perspective on IC. Yet, as we demonstrate below, this declared merger between the collective and the individual is in fact reduced to either a social or a cognitive standpoint in both versions of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017), resulting in inconsistencies in the positioning of IC. In order to highlight these asymmetries, we discuss the approach to IC in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) in terms of its compliance with the latest perspectives on IC, consequently stressing that not only are both versions of the Framework (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) incompatible with recent developments in IC research but also incongruous with their purpose and require further reconstructions.

Adopting the communicative approach, the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) distinguishes between general and communicative language competences. General competences are divided into knowledge, skills and know-how, existential competence and ability to learn with intercultural awareness and intercultural skills being part of general competences. Communicative language competences are divided into three basic categories: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. Linguistic competence consists of lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences. The subcomponents of sociolinguistic competence include “knowledge and skills required to deal with the social dimension of language use” (Council of Europe 2001: 118). Therefore, the authors of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) base their model of the communicative approach on ‘the inverted pyramid’ classroom model proposed by Savignon (1983), where context plays a crucial role in the development of communicative competence, which consists of grammatical, discourse, sociocultural and strategic competences. Being interrelat-

ed, the four capacities affect each other, i.e. any change in one competence leads to a change in overall communicative competence. All of this is predicated on a competence/performance dichotomy (reminiscent of Chomskian cognitive approach) incorporated under the concept of communicative competence by the advocates of the communicative approach (Austin 1962, Searle 1969, Wilkins 1972, Hymes 1972, Canale and Swain 1980, Savignon 1983, Brumfit 1984, van Ek 1985 and Widdowson 1989), to whom the authors of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001) refer<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) strives to position IC between the social and the cognitive under the communicative approach, which results in a number of asymmetries. Interestingly, these imbalances are neatly unified in contemporary research on IC.

## 2. CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON IC IN RESEARCH

Following Kecskes (2014), who voices the need for a balanced model of IC, current research in the intercultural paradigm captures an interplay between the social and the cognitive, i.e. the two seemingly opposing categories, by situating IC in a socio-cognitive perspective, which revisits the positioning of a native speaker in IC, the relationship between IC and language competence and the development of IC.

A socio-cognitive approach defined by Kecskes (2014: 47) as integrating “the pragmatic view of cooperation” with the “cognitive view of egocentrism”, emphasizes the interplay between collective prior knowledge, individual prior knowledge and actual situational knowledge in meaning construction. Thus, prior experience and actual situational experience interact, which leads to the construction of IC. Equally important in the perspective is the rejection of a cognitive-mentalist competence/performance dichotomy, which results in the emphasis on inseparability between IC, communicative competence and its aspects. As highlighted by researchers (Kecskes 2014, Strugielska and Piątkowska 2017), language plays an essential role in integrating the social and the cognitive in IC. Namely, formulaic expressions with their psychological saliency and common grounds in cultural aspects constitute a shared platform between IC and language competence (Kecskes 2014).

Considering the communicative approach as a structurally-based perspective on communication, which leads to a passive understanding of language (Matsuo 2014), interculturalists reject the approach and its entailments. Following Bakhtin’s notions of heteroglossia and polyglossia (Matsuo 2014), the intercultural paradigm discards the concept of a native speaker as such a position does not reflect cross-cultural aspects and a variety of cultural contexts (Kramsch 1993, Dervin 2006, Matsuo 2014) in intercultural communication, which is grounded in the positioning of self in online social encounters where mediation between languages and cultures takes place (an ecological perspective), resulting in, what Kramsch (1993) calls, ‘the third space’. In other words, a monolithic and static view of languages and cultures is replaced with a dynamic nature

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<sup>1</sup> Although the 2017 version of the Framework (Council of Europe 2017) does not relate to the above-mentioned supporters of the communicative approach in a direct way, the influence is still discernible.

of these notions constructed in a lingua franca context, in which languages and cultures intersect and merge, creating a hybrid of features (Kecskes 2014). Thus, IC is discussed in terms of transnational and heterogeneous aspects of culture and language (Kramsch 1993, Byram 1997).

Relevant literature points to an experiential and constructionist nature of IC. In the same vein, research in the context of language education (see Peckenpaugh 2012, Rygg 2014, McBride and Gu 2015, Strugielska and Piątkowska 2017) demonstrates that IC is developed through meaning construction rather than convergence of competences, which implies integration of language competence and IC. The same literature reveals an unpredictable, aperiodic and non-linear nature of IC, which emerges through meaning negotiation, affected by prior and actual situational context (Kecskes 2014), which entails the treatment of a learner as a social and individual agent. Thus, various types of competence are treated holistically, i.e. as a manifestation of one another. In other words, IC forms a complex system. This entails that it cannot be reduced to either the cognitive or the social. Instead, any approach to IC has to capture asymmetries between the collective and the individual in a balanced, symmetrical, holistic and integrative manner.

### 3. THE CEFR'S PERSPECTIVE ON IC

In the following discussion we examine the extent to which the perspective on IC in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) reflects the holistic tendencies in intercultural research described above. To this end, the notion of IC emerging from the Framework is evaluated with reference to the positioning of a native speaker in IC, the relationship between IC and communicative language competences, and ways of developing IC, all of which seem entailed by the communicative approach endorsed by the authors of the Framework.

#### 3.1. The positioning of a native speaker in IC

Savignon (2001: 16) notices that methodologists working in a communicative paradigm tend to focus on native speaker cultural norms in their interpretations of the approach, which entails the native and the target language culture dichotomy, setting IC in a solid and differentialist approach which defines the role of an intercultural speaker as mastering native speakers' conventions. Thus, the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) applies the communicative approach with its rigid duality between first language culture and target language culture, a heterogeneous picture of culture and a native speaker as a role model to the interpretation of IC, which is developed in a lingua franca context where a native speaker ceases to exert their influence on pedagogical norms. Consequently, at the level of declarations and theoretical underpinnings, the Framework (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) represents a reductionist position and appears to shift from a transnational paradigm back to a national paradigm in its approach to learning and

teaching IC, positioned in a social, monolithic perspective and thus inconsistent with current tendencies in research on IC.

Interestingly, while the constructs of IC, anchored in the communicative approach, seem to contradict the intended purpose of creating a shared space and instead focus on a linguistically and culturally monolithic context, illustrative descriptors for particular levels presented in the 2017 version of the Framework go beyond native speakerism as a goal of IC, taking into consideration a lingua franca context. This can be illustrated by the following examples. With reference to sociolinguistic appropriateness one of the descriptors for level C2 has been changed in the following way: “appreciates virtually all the sociolinguistic and sociocultural implications of language used by proficient speakers of the target language and can react accordingly” (Council of Europe 2017: 137). Thus, the perspective in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2017) oscillates between two contradictory social views, i.e. a social heterogeneous perspective declared and applied in illustrative descriptors and a social monolithic view implied by adopting the communicative approach.

Moreover, adopting a native speaker perspective results in the tendency to essentialize and differentiate cultures, which is reflected in illustrative descriptors of intercultural skills and know-how, including “the ability to bring the culture of origin and the foreign culture into relation with each other” (Council of Europe 2001: 104). This position is maintained in the 2017 document (Council of Europe 2017), which foregrounds similarities and differences between cultures and the ability to compare them and verbalize the differences. Consequently, although not provided explicitly, the definition of interculturality which emerges from the way the notion is approached in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) entails comparing two cultures, i.e. the culture of origin and the target culture, and consequently adapting one’s language behaviour to the standards existing in the target language. The concepts of “the world of origin” and “the world of the target community” (Council of Europe 2001: 103), borrowed from Byram’s (1997) model, pose interpretive difficulties. First, we believe that the wording in this case is not transparent as it is not clear what ‘the world’ refers to. Further explanation that “intercultural awareness includes an awareness of regional and social diversity in both worlds” (Council of Europe 2001: 103) is not helpful in untangling the concept. The meaning presented by the current authors based on their understanding of the CEFR is that ‘the world’ refers to the concept of L1 and L2 culture. Thus, the Framework (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) assumes a static, solid and monolithic view of culture where the boundaries between native and foreign, self and others are fixed (Boye 2016: 37) and the role of a learner is to master the conventions of ‘the world of the target community’, i.e. in fact to mimic the sociocultural competence of a native speaker of the target language. Thus, the authors of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) assume a social perspective with a national and homogeneous view of culture and essentialize its nature, stemming from adopting the communicative approach with a native speaker perspective as its core.

### 3.2 The relationship between IC and communicative language competences

Communicative language competences are key competences in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) which determine effective intercultural communication. Although the Framework makes reference to Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, the approach to communicative language competences is different from Byram's perspective. First, the authors of the CEFR distinguish between linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences while Byram refers to linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competences. Discourse competence is included in pragmatic competences in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) as they concern "the mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence, the identification of text types and forms, irony, and parody" along with "the functional use of linguistic resources" (Council of Europe 2001: 13). Moreover, the lack of the word 'intercultural' in the concept of communicative language competences in the Framework may reveal the absence of an intercultural aspect, which is an encompassing framework in Byram's (1997) model. Both models incorporate similar subcomponents of communicative competence, as mentioned above. However, while Byram (1997) connects elements of communicative competence with intercultural aspects in a modular fashion, the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001: 2017) strives to incorporate elements of sociocultural competence in communicative language competences under the guise of IC. The only common denominator with Byram is that the Framework does so in a compositional manner. Thus, the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001) appears to tend towards both a monofaceted nature of communicative competences and a dichotomy between the intercultural and the communicative.

The CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) distinguishes between IC, sociocultural competence (within general competences) and sociolinguistic competences. While sociocultural competence is synthesized as knowledge of the world and defined as "knowledge of the society and culture of the community or communities in which a language is spoken" (Council of Europe 2001: 103) with reference to everyday living, living conditions, interpersonal relations, values, beliefs and attitudes, body language, social conventions and ritual behaviour, IC relates to the comparison between "the world of origin" and "the world of the target community" (Council of Europe 2001: 103), the knowledge of which constitutes the basis of sociocultural competence. Sociolinguistic competences are understood as the "sociocultural conditions of language use" (Council of Europe 2001: 13). Social conventions of language use such as "rules of politeness, norms governing relations between generations, sexes, classes and social groups, linguistic codification of certain fundamental rituals in the functioning of a community" (Council of Europe 2001: 13) affect all aspects of language communication between interlocutors. Therefore, the construct embraces facets of both intercultural and sociocultural competences. Although the three notions, i.e. IC, sociocultural competence and sociolinguistic competences, specify similar concepts, the descriptors referring to them almost entirely exemplify aspects of sociocultural and sociolinguistic competences, mixing them and further supporting the argument either for a dichotomy between IC and sociocultural competence in the CEFR

or the substitution of IC with sociocultural and sociolinguistic competences in the Framework. For example, only one descriptor for level B2 relating to global scales describes an aspect of sociolinguistic competence with no reference to IC defined as a comparison of two viewpoints: “can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party” (Council of Europe 2001: 24). Similarly, illustrative scales refer only to sociolinguistic competence as those listed below for level C1:

- Can use language flexibly and effectively for social purposes, including emotional, allusive and joking usage.
- Can easily follow and contribute to complex interactions between third parties in group discussion even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics.
- Can easily keep up with the debate, even on abstract, complex unfamiliar topics.
- Can argue a formal position convincingly, responding to questions and comments and answering complex lines of counter argument fluently, spontaneously and appropriately.
- Can express him/herself with clarity and precision, relating to the addressee flexibly and effectively.
- Can express him/herself with clarity and precision in personal correspondence, using language flexibly and effectively, including emotional, allusive and joking usage.
- Can select a suitable phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to preface his/her remarks appropriately in order to get the floor, or to gain time and keep the floor whilst thinking.
- Can relate own contribution skilfully to those of other speakers (Council of Europe 2001: 76–86, 2017: 83–97).

Consequently, the positioning of intercultural, sociocultural and sociolinguistic competences in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001) demonstrates certain inconsistencies in a social approach adopted which, on the one hand, declares a fusion of the three competences, ascribing to Kramsch’s (1993) concept of thirdness, but on the other hand, applies a communicative approach in illustrative descriptors by bringing sociocultural and sociolinguistic competences to the fore and undermining IC. Furthermore, there is no change in the approach in the revised version of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2017).

As well as expounding the (inconsistently) social nature of IC, the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) highlights a compositional and modular character of the competence, which means shifting towards the cognitive end of the socio-cognitive continuum. To begin with, IC is not clearly defined, however its components are distinguished, i.e. intercultural awareness, intercultural skills and know-how and attitudes. Drawing on Byram’s (1997) compositional model of IC, the authors of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) view IC as a competence within several competences verbalized in Byram’s terms as *savoirs*. IC is part of general competences whose elements include declarative knowledge (*savoir*), general skills and know-how (*savoir-fair*) and existential competence (*savoir-être*). Intercultural awareness, set within declarative knowledge, is treated alongside knowledge of the world and sociocultural knowledge. It is a result of the convergence of knowledge based on understanding differences between one’s own and the target language culture, awareness of differences between various cultures as

well as understanding how various cultures relate to each other. Intercultural skills and know-how, which are elements of skills and know-how together with practical skills and know-how, include the ability to bring different cultures into relation with each other, to use a variety of strategies in interaction with representatives of other cultures, to deal effectively with misunderstandings arising from cross-cultural differences and to overcome stereotypes. Attitudes are included in existential competence. In the model they are placed alongside motivations, values, beliefs, cognitive styles, and personality factors. Attitudes are affected by individuals' knowledge and skills and refer to the ability to divorce oneself from one's cultural point of view to a cultural diversity and awareness of culturally imposed perspectives. In other words, the goal of attitudes is to develop an intercultural personality. Thus, the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) treats sub-components of IC as separate (there is no declaration throughout the document about their interrelation), which may speak to a more dichotomous nature of this competence.

Similarly, the perspective of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) on the relationship between IC and communicative language competences is contradictory. On the one hand, although IC is declared to be associated with communicative language competences, general competences, to which IC is linked, are not language specific but are "called upon for actions of all kinds, including language activities" (Council of Europe 2001: 9). The separation between general competences (and IC as a consequence) and communicative language competences is supported by the following statement: "All human competences contribute in one way or another to the language user's ability to communicate and may be regarded as aspects of communicative competence" (Council of Europe 2001: 101). The authors of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001) keep general competences and communicative language competences separate on the grounds that the former are brought by learners to a foreign language classroom, unintentionally suggesting that IC is not affected by language learning despite their declaration about a mutual relationship between IC and language competence. On the other hand, the CEFR states that "individuals as social agents develop a range of competences, both general and in particular communicative language competences [...]" (Council of Europe 2001: 9), clearly indicating an interface between general competences, and IC in consequence, and communicative language competences. These contradictory statements about the nature of IC lead to its unspecified positioning in the language learning model of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001). Equally unclear is the relationship between the elements of IC and the components of communicative language competences. These inconsistencies stem from an unbalanced approach to the relationship between IC and communicative language competences, which, in turn, is the result of adopting the communicative approach. Neither is reference to Byram (1997), for whom IC can exist with or without communicative language competences, helpful.

Although the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001) declares IC to be part of communicative language competences, only one illustrative descriptor of IC relates to this interaction:



A need to deal with ambiguity when faced with cultural diversity:

- looking for sociolinguistic and pragmatic ambiguity and adjusting his/her reactions, modify his/her language, reflect upon them, etc.

A need for understanding that different cultures may have different practices, cultural norms:

- commenting and comparing cultural elements/differences;

- discussing how actions may be perceived by people belonging to other cultures.

A need to take into consideration differences in behaviours (including gestures, tones and attitudes):

- discussing overgeneralisations and stereotypes.

A need to recognise similarities and use them as a basis to improve communication:

- explaining features of a culture;

- analysing and discussing documents.

A will to show sensitivity to differences and readiness to offer and ask for clarification:

- anticipating possible risks of misunderstanding (Council of Europe 2017: 98–99).

A polarization of concepts between IC and communicative language competences, characteristic of the 2001 document, is abandoned in the statement of purpose in the 2017 Framework, which declares that “in any communicative situation, general competences (e.g. knowledge of the world, socio-cultural competence, intercultural competence, professional experience) are always combined with communicative language competences” (Council of Europe 2017: 160). The authors of the document justify such an approach on the grounds that knowledge of the world, sociocultural knowledge and intercultural awareness are manifestations of the same construct. So are practical skills and know-how, which include social skills and sociocultural knowledge or intercultural skills and know-how. However, illustrative descriptors relating to IC are included under the concept of facilitating pluricultural space viewed as mediating communication, which is a category separate from both general and communicative competences (Council of Europe 2017: 121–211). Mediating communication is one of the categories of mediation activities along with mediating a text and mediating concepts and includes facilitating intercultural space, acting as an intermediary in informal situations and facilitating communication in delicate situations and disagreements. Although the concept of pluricultural space is not integrated with general competences or communicative competences, illustrative descriptors for pluricultural space refer to language skills as in the following examples:

Can facilitate an intercultural exchange by showing welcome and interest with simple words and non-verbal signals, by inviting others to speak and by indicating whether he/she understands when addressed directly.

Can contribute to an intercultural exchange, using simple words to ask people to explain things and to get clarification of what they say, whilst exploiting his/her limited repertoire to express agreement, to invite, to thank etc.

Can support an intercultural exchange using a limited repertoire to introduce people from different cultural backgrounds and to ask and answer questions, showing awareness that some questions may be perceived differently in the cultures concerned.

Can support communication across cultures by initiating conversation, showing interest and empathy by asking and answering simple questions, and expressing agreement and understanding (Council of Europe 2017: 121–211).

Mediation is a key concept in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2017), which, as mentioned above, relates to a text, concepts and communication. Set in reception and production, mediation is possible through interaction, and is expected to link the social and the cognitive. Acting as a social agent, a learner in mediation creates the space in constructing and conveying the meaning as well as in creating the space and conditions for communication (Council of Europe 2017: 99). Therefore, in its definition of mediation, the CEFR (Council of Europe 2017) refers to Kramersch's (1993) notion of the third space, which forms the basis of IC. However, illustrative descriptors for mediating a text and concepts do not refer to any intercultural aspects (Council of Europe 2017: 103–119). Thus, although the Framework (Council of Europe 2017) adopts a holistic approach to IC and communicative language competences in its declaration, it tends towards a social, action-based perspective on the concept typical of the communicative approach, by embedding interculturality in mediating communication.

Even more problematic is the relation between IC and language use. Although the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) declares that language is a social phenomenon and, as a consequence, all aspects of sociocultural competence are relevant to sociolinguistic competence (set within communicative language competences) and language use in particular (Council of Europe 2001: 118), there is no similar statement for the interface between IC and sociolinguistic competence. In fact, none of the descriptors of IC refers to language use, which speaks to the fact that the nature of IC is not related to language. Therefore, despite adopting Byram's (1997) approach, where communicative competence and IC are declared to be mutually related, the authors of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001: 118) keep these two competences apart in their model. The 2017 version of the CEFR introduces a declaration about interconnections between IC and communicative language competences. However, this statement is not supported by the descriptors of these two competences.

Such a perspective on IC, therefore, diverges from both the socio-cognitive approach emanating from current research discussed above and from the statement of purpose expressed in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017). IC in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) is viewed as a monofaceted phenomenon composed of explicit and tacit components of culture as opposed to a multifaceted notion constituting intangible aspects based on experience, which is declared in the introductory chapter of the Framework (Council of Europe 2001, 2017). Consequently, IC is not integrated with communicative language competences. As opposed to a dynamic notion constructed through interaction as declared by the CEFR (2017) by referring to Kramersch's (1993) model, IC is perceived as a solid and stable category or a target to be achieved by a learner. Hence, IC is motivated by differences which are meant to be explored by learners, as this guarantees effective intercultural communication. Declarative knowledge appears

to be far more important than learners' meta-cultural awareness, which may suggest a cognitive stance.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper presented an evolutionary nature of the socio-cognitive approach to IC in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017), which appears to oscillate between a social and a cognitive view, in light of current perspectives on IC. The Framework (Council of Europe 2017) declares an action-oriented approach, which “represents a shift away from syllabuses based on a linear progression through language structures, or a pre-determined set of notions and functions, towards syllabuses based on needs analysis, oriented towards real-life tasks and constructed around purposefully selected notions and functions” (2017: 26). Yet, IC in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) emerges as a compositional concept, which implies a hierarchical and cumulative nature of IC whose separate elements are to create an integrated whole, i.e. IC is the sum of all sub-competences which make up a whole greater than the sum of its elements. Its structural and static nature is very close to a cognitive conception of competence. Most significantly, the portrayal and classification of the components of IC are not clearly delineated and the boundaries between intercultural awareness, skills and know-how and attitudes seem to be blurred, i.e. the difference between these subcomponents is not specified and the descriptors referring to them permeate each other. Likewise, the relationship between the elements of IC and other elements treated alongside IC is not elaborated on, which gives the impression that IC is an autonomous competence, i.e. independent of other competences, including communicative language competences. Consequently, IC is not a transversal competence although the authors of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) adhere to an intercultural perspective as an encompassing framework in their statement of purpose. The document is inconsistent in positioning IC on the socio-cognitive continuum, which results in emerging asymmetries and contradictions (see Table 1 for a summary of the perspective on IC in current research and the CEFR). However, the above analysis demonstrates that the new version of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2017) strives to reinterpret the concept of IC and embraces a more dynamic approach to the phenomenon. Yet, current perspectives appear to offer a more unifying socio-cognitive view on IC. Nevertheless, theoretical underpinnings of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) might set directions for further research.

The concept of IC is constantly evolving. In its latest document *Competence for Democratic Culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies*, the Council of Europe (2016) argues that the notion of competence is grounded in interculturality which is dynamic, holistic and constantly constructed. Competence is equated with the notion of ability and “the ability to meet complex demands within a given context” (Council of Europe 2016: 23) in particular. Similarly, IC is defined as “the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant psychological resources in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities presented

by intercultural situations” (Council of Europe 2016: 23). Consequently, the Council of Europe (2016) stresses a contextual, relative, individual, psychological, social and action-based nature of IC, which should be taken into consideration in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017). Psychological resources, i.e. values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding, are applied by individuals in a coordinated, adaptive and dynamic manner (Council of Europe 2016: 23). This definition reveals that the Council of Europe embraces a dynamic definition of IC, which is more in line with the nature of IC as presented in intercultural research. Consequently, whatever direction the CEFR (Council of Europe 2017) will take in the future, current discussion in the intercultural paradigm and the solutions suggested by the Council of Europe engender that the approach to IC in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 2017) might need refining.

Table 1. Perspectives on IC – current research and the CEFR (2001, 2017).

Current research	The CEFR 2001	The CEFR 2017
A socio-cognitive perspective: the social and the cognitive integrated in a balanced way	A socio-cognitive perspective declared in the statement of purpose but not applied	A socio-cognitive perspective declared in the statement of purpose but not applied
The communicative approach rejected: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a learner as a social and individual agent</li> <li>- a native speaker as a role model rejected (a lingua franca context taken into consideration)</li> <li>- No dichotomy between IC, sociocultural and sociolinguistic competences</li> <li>- IC treated in a holistic manner</li> <li>- IC integrated with language competence</li> <li>- IC and language use integrated</li> </ul>	The communicative approach declared and applied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a learner as a social agent</li> <li>- a native speaker as a role model</li> <li>- IC declared equivalent with sociocultural and sociolinguistic competences but at the same time dichotomy between IC, sociolinguistic and sociocultural competences in illustrative descriptors</li> <li>- IC subdivided into several subcomponents - a modular and dichotomous nature of IC</li> <li>- the relationship between IC and communicative language competences contradictory, i.e. declarations supporting the interface on non-interface positions; illustrative descriptors in favour of the non-interface position</li> <li>- IC and language use kept separate</li> </ul>	The communicative approach not declared but applied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a learner as a social agent</li> <li>- a lingua franca context taken into consideration in illustrative descriptors but the role of a native speaker emphasized by adopting the communicative approach</li> <li>- IC declared equivalent with sociocultural and sociolinguistic competences but at the same time dichotomy between IC, sociolinguistic and sociocultural competences in illustrative descriptors</li> <li>- IC subdivided into several subcomponents - a modular and dichotomous nature of IC</li> <li>- the interface between IC and communicative language competences declared but illustrative descriptors supporting the non-interface position</li> <li>- relationship between IC and language use declared but not supported by illustrative descriptors</li> </ul>

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## STRESZCZENIE

### **Krytyczne spojrzenie na podejście do kompetencji interkulturowej w Europejskim Systemie Opisu Kształcenia Językowego**

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencja interkulturowa, Europejski System Opisu Kształcenia Językowego.

W 2001 Rada Europy opublikowała Europejski System Opisu Kształcenia Językowego (ESOKJ), którego jednym z głównych celów jest wzmocnienie edukacji interkulturowej w nauczania języków obcych. Szesnaście lat później pojawiła się nowa propozycja ESOKJ, która stawia sobie za cel lepsze przygotowanie uczących się do komunikacji interkulturowej. Niniejszy artykuł analizuje podejście do kompetencji interkulturowej w ESOKJ (2001, 2017) i podkreśla potrzebę bardziej spójnej i zaktualizowanej perspektywy.