**How to Translate ‘una Plaza’: the Cultural Foundation of Language Teaching**

Rita Cancino, PhD and associate professor of Spanish

*Department of Language and Culture*

*Aalborg University*

*Aalborg, Denmark*

**Outline**

This article presents and discusses the European language project ‘Europodians’ within the framework of theories of intercultural language learning. Its aim is to provide a theoretical foundation for such language projects as well as a discussion of practical implications of approaching language learning from this theoretical point of view. It is part of the argument in this article that it is highly problematic not to make one’s theoretical standpoint clear before designing actual language courses in different languages. The article consists of two parts: The first part introduces the Europodians project and the theoretical and political framework for the discussion; the second part discusses practical examples of problematic areas for designing the actual Danish language course.

**Introducing Europodians**

Europodians is a research project funded by the European Socrates language programme (2006-2009). Its aim is to create language courses in 11 European languages at level A1 and A2 (basic user: breakthrough and waystage).[[1]](#endnote-1) The target group is young adults, for example university students wishing to take (part of) their education in a/another European country. There are three important requirements of these language courses: 1. all 11 language courses must have the same basic design and structure and cover the same communicative situations, 2. they must be designed for IPods or other mobile devices, and 3. they must integrate language and culture. Taken together these requirements pose different kinds of challenges for the actual designing of the language courses. There are obvious linguistic challenges caused by the variety of languages in the project (Indo-European: Romance (Spanish), Germanic (Danish), Baltic (Latvian, Lithuanian), Slavic (Czech, Slovak)), Uralic: Finno-Ugric (Hungarian, Estonian), Simitic (Maltese), and Altaic (Turkish). The differences among these languages in terms of grammar, syntax and pronunciation complicate the possibilities of a shared structure for all courses. Furthermore, there are media-related challenges caused by the need to design language courses suited to small screens and taking into account file size, estimated download time, etc, which must be faced to ensure that the courses will actually work for language users using mobile devices. Finally, the requirement of integrating language and culture necessitates reflection on the nature of the relation between language and culture – both in more general theoretical terms and in terms more specifically aimed at language learning. This article focuses on this third requirement, acknowledging that the two other requirements need to be addressed as well.

**Framework of Intercultural Language Learning (IcLL or ILT)**

As a framework for a discussion of the relations between language and culture in a teaching and learning context, we will rely on key concepts of ‘intercultural language learning’ (abbreviated as IcLL or ILT) as introduced by Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet in their 1999 book *Striving for the Third Place*. Our focus will be on the concepts of ‘culture’ and its place in language learning, ‘interculture’ as the aim of language learning, and ‘the third place’ as a way of conceptualising intercultural communication skills.

Following Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, in language teaching ‘culture’ is not the fifth macro-skill (in addition to the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing) as seen in Damen 1987 – it is integrated in all skills, and at all levels: even very simple language conveys culture, and it is simply not possible to teach language in a kind of cultural vacuum before ‘adding’ culture. So ‘culture’ is not a separate skill but an inherent part of language. Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet point to the fact that even methods of language teaching with the proclaimed aim of teaching people to communicate across cultures (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet mentions both the direct method, the audio-lingual method, and the Communicative Approach) have not treated culture as an inherent part of language, and they state that:

[t]he Communicative Approach as the most current and widely spread approach for language teaching in the Western world today has not significantly improved the teaching of communication in a foreign language. It also has not significantly contributed to the promotion of intercultural competence or cross-cultural understandings. (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 10)

Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet substantiate this claim by referring to the ways in which language teaching still remains mainly based on written forms and that the inseparability of language, and culture is still underplayed: language itself *is* culture, but this understanding of language (and culture) has not been realised in actual language teaching.

ILT supports the development of the learner’s intercultural competence. This is much in line with the current emphasis in language teaching on ‘communicative competences’, one of which is intercultural competence. ILT adopts the notion of ‘linguaculture’ coined by Attinasi and Friedrich in 1988 (Attinasi and Friedrich as cited in Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet), and it is characteristic of ILT that the method focuses not only on the target linguaculture but also on the learner’s first linguaculture. It therefore works by means of comparison between learners’ first language/culture and target language/culture. Methodologically, this is nothing new, of course, as methods of foreign language teaching have always contained an element of comparison in them (for example in 19th century grammar and translation methods REF). However, ILT’s focus on the inseparability of language and culture, *also* in the learner’s first linguaculture, distinguishes the method from former comparative methods: ‘... every presentational and comparative language teaching activity is a potentially rich source for foregrounding cultural difference within a framework of similarity’ (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 12). Through this ILT method learners will develop their intercultural competences. For Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, intercultural competence means ‘the ability to recognise where and when culture is manifest in cross-cultural encounters and the ability to manage an intercultural space where all parties to the encounter are comfortable participants’ (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 13). Consequently, developing intercultural competences through language learning involves getting a (better) understanding of how the worldview of the learner’s first linguaculture operates and an awareness of what one’s cultural boundaries are. ‘The third space’ then refers to ‘“a meeting place” where the understanding of how different worldviews operate (in one’s own linguaculture and in foreign linguacultures) frees the mind to explore and at the same time[[2]](#endnote-2) to create interculturality’ (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 13).

ILT has a political/ideological aim in addition to the purely didactic aim. Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet link ILT to multicultural education, whose aims they define as tolerance, peace and cross-cultural understanding (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 11), and it seems clear that intercultural competence is linked with an idea of harmony and peace: Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet stress that the successful management of intercultural spaces involves a deliberate choice of harmony/peace over conflict/war, not only an understanding of the dynamics of cross-cultural encounters (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 13). This view of the political aim of language teaching is seen in Lo Bianco’s chapter “A ‘Syntax of Peace’?”, which treats language learning as a means of bringing peace in areas of conflict (Lo Bianco, 1999). This is not to say that the method is naive or blind to the relations between language and power. On the contrary, Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet point to the empowering aspect of accessing a language in an intercultural perspective (see below).

**Implications of ICL for language teaching**

In their concluding chapter, Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet emphasise that ILT means a move away from the traditional conception of language proficiency. In ILT the aim of making the learner as much as possible like a native speaker is replaced by an aim of making him or her comfortable and capable in an intercultural context. ‘The native speaker norm is replaced with a bilingual norm as the desirable outcome of language teaching and learning.’ (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 181) Consequently, the language learner is not viewed as a ‘defective native speaker’ but as ‘a **user** of language drawing upon the resources available to him/her’ (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 181 – emphasis original). This intercultural context is characterised by a need for language users to use multiple perspectives to understand and create meaning. Language users are *inter*cultural language users when they inhabit ‘the third place’, as Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet define it:

The third space can only be established as a validation of both self and other. Both the original and the evolving cultural identity of the learner need to be valued and included explicitly in the process. Also the target culture needs to be valued and included. The process is not one of competition between each pole, with one inevitably replacing the other, rather it is a continual negotiation between the poles, until learners find a comfortable position leading to a hybrid third place for themselves. (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 182)

Thus, language learners should not strive for assimilation into the target language, but instead work towards establishing a third place where several linguacultures are negotiated.

ICL also calls for a reconceptualisation of ‘language’. Language is seen as something beyond the linguistic code, and it is therefore not enough for language learners to gain knowledge of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. And it is not a question of simply ‘adding’ new modules to the code (e.g. pragmatics and discourse); it is a question of recognising that ‘the linguistic code itself is situated practice as well as an artefact’ (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 182). This also means that culture cannot be an ‘added module’ but must be recognised, also in practice, as inseparable from the code. ‘Culture is also variable and interactional. It is created by talk and creates talk’ (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 183). This way of viewing language entails a re-evaluation of what kinds of language should be taught: ICL gives greater priority to spoken language and informal registers ‘where culture is enacted in the daily lives of language users’ at the expense of written language and formal registers (because these more formal registers, according to ICL, rely on approaches to culture as knowledge and aesthetic). This emphasis on spoken, everyday language (as well as the mistrust of the written and aesthetic language of for example literature) is reminiscent of ‘The Direct Method’ of the early 20th century – the difference is that ICL emphasises context much more than did the practitioners of the direct method.

For ICL ‘context’ means more than the linguistic context of a sentence or utterance or the physical context in which talk is produced, and it also moves beyond the social context emphasised by sociolinguistics. ICL wants to also include ‘the macro-contexts in which teaching and learning and language use occur’, which include the political context, the economic context, and the ethnic context, as well as the micro-level of interaction between participants. For language teaching to be empowering for the language learner, it must take into account ‘the additional load language bears’ (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 185) and not only be limited to ‘teaching the code, viewed as an objective, isolated artefact’ (184). This means that language teaching should integrate and make available to the learner the whole ‘loaded language’ and teach language as practice. ‘Empowerment comes through understanding language as practice and understanding the cultural context in which the practice is manifested. ... [Teaching which empowers] is also teaching which recognises that the first language is similarly loaded and which respects and validates the practices which learners bring to the learning of the second language.’ (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 185) By the same logic, language teaching can also be disempowering, and a form of linguistic and cultural imperialism, if it fails to integrate context and teach language as ‘loaded language’. Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet place the responsibility for actualising empowering language teaching on the language teacher, but they also emphasise that it is not only a question of method applied in the classroom but of language and education policy in general.

**Europodians within a European context of intercultural communication**

Intercultural communication is an important political issue for the European Union. In 2006 the European Parliament and the Council declared 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and in the decision by the European Parliament and the Council, it says:

At the heart of the European project, it is important to provide the means for intercultural dialogue and dialogue between citizens to strengthen respect for cultural diversity and deal with the complex reality in our societies and the coexistence of different cultural identities and beliefs. Furthermore, it is important to highlight the contribution of different cultures to the Member States' heritage and way of life and to recognise that culture and intercultural dialogue are essential for learning to live together in harmony. (DECISION No 1983/2006/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 18 December 2006 concerning the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008))

This section of the decision clearly illustrates the aim of intercultural dialogue as ‘harmony’, and as such it corresponds to the effect of intercultural competence, as referred to above. Furthermore, it treats intercultural dialogue as a *didactic* means of achieving a political goal (‘**learning** to live together in harmony’ – emphasis added).

Europodians can evidently be considered one such means for intercultural dialogue, in so far as it aims to integrate language and culture teaching and learning. As it says on the official Europodians webpage, ‘**Language** is **culture**. For this reason, our materials include discussions on a wide variety of cultural topics in each language course: from economy to celebrations, from housing to health, from family relationships to shopping.’ (<http://www.europodians.mobi/>, retrieved.10.24.08 – emphasis original). In addition, Europodians explicitly seeks to enhance intercultural dialogue through its use of an interactive website, where language learners can communicate with other language learners and native speakers. On the webpage, it says, ‘Practice the language as much as you can and make new friends around the world’, which – together with the option of practising language skills – again underlines the ‘peace and harmony goal’ (‘and make new friends all over the world’). The European Socrates language programme decided to fund the Europodians project for the following three reasons: 1. its innovative use of IT, 2. its inclusion of many ‘small’ European languages, and 3. its focus on multiculturality. Thus, the fundamental conception of language as culture together with the use of interactive media provide Europodians with a good starting point for becoming a successful means for intercultural dialogue as presented in the Decision by the European Parliament and the Council.

Europodians also shares the European Parliament and the Council’s view on ‘culture’. In the declaration cited above, culture is related to ‘the complex reality of societies’, to ‘identities and beliefs’ and to [the member states’] ‘way of life’. This conception of ‘culture’ in the declaration reflects both more general conceptions of culture in contemporary cultural theory which stresses exactly culture as a ‘whole way of life’ (a notion that goes back to Raymond Williams’ *Keywords* from 1976, but which is still a key way of understanding the concept of culture in cultural theory) and the concept of culture underlying ICL. In his article ‘The Conceptulisation of the Cultural Component of Language Teaching in Australian Language-in-education Policy’, Liddicoat argues for a ‘dynamic approach’ to culture, ‘which views culture as sets of variable practices in which people engage in order to live their lives and which are continually created and recreated by participants in interaction.’ (Liddicoat, 301). On the basis of this understanding of culture as *variable practices*, Liddicoat concludes that cultural knowledge is not about learning about a culture (its facts and artefacts) but how to engage with that culture (through language). Consequently, ‘the scope of culture learning moves beyond awareness, understanding and sympathy and begins to address the ways in which culture learning will be practised by learners.’ (Liddicoat, 301). Europodians aims to use everyday *realia* (authentic texts) in its courses (dialogues, maps, entry tickets, menus, forms, recipes, identity cards, application forms), and it introduces a variety of cultural topics (see above), which can all be seen as ways of helping the learner learn not only the target language but also how to engage with the target culture.

With these appropriate starting points (from an ICL perspective), the Europodians courses constitute a well-founded option for the promotion of intercultural competence or cross-cultural understandings in Europe. But, as Liddicoat has pointed out, there is sometimes a gap between proclaimed aims and actual teaching, which means that designers of language courses must be very aware of how they can put into practice the idea of integrated language and culture teaching, and how they can ensurethat the language teaching will actually make learners develop their intercultural competences. The rest of this article will discuss some of the challenges the designing of the Danish course has faced us with.

**Designing the language courses**

To ensure the comparability and consistency among the courses, each should be structured as a travel guide based on the underlying conceptual metaphors LEARNING IS A JOURNEY, KNOWLEDGE IS A LANDSCAPE, and IDEAS ARE OBJECTS. Furthermore, a template (in Spanish) was developed for each course element, and a glossary of words and terms to be used in all courses was compiled (again with Spanish as the point of departure). The first two tasks for the representatives of the other 10 languages were, within the framework established by the underlying metaphors, to ‘translate’ the Spanish template into their own language, and to fill in the glossary with the corresponding terms in each language. Both tasks faced us with various challenges caused by the ways in which Spanish culture was embedded both in the cultural topics of the templates for the course elements and the choice of words for the glossary. The problem was of course not that language embeds culture; rather, this had not been *realised* in the Spanish templates and the glossary.

Maria José Aguilar gives a possible explanation for this ‘blindness’ to one’s own culture:

We are so familiar to our own culture that we don’t even realize it is there and, inevitably, it influences our expectations when we establish contact with people belonging to a different culture. […] Driven by ethnocentrism, we tend to take as ‘normal’ what we know, what we are familiar with, and when confronted with new situations we may lose footing. (Aguilar, 62)

Thus, the choice of communicative situations and their contexts as well as which words would make up the glossary were all founded in the Spanish *linguaculture*. These were expressed in the conceptions of geography, city planning, identity documentation, family relations, and politics.

To describe a country’s geography, the glossary included the concepts of *river* and *mountain.* These words do exist in the Danish language (*flod* and *bjerg* respespectively), the words do not belong to an integrated language and culture Danish course at levels A1 and A2, simply because there are no rivers or mountains in Denmark. There are *brooks* (Danish: *bæk*) and *streams* (Danish: *å*), but no rivers. Likewise, *hill* (Danish: *bakke*) would be more appropriate than mountain: the highest point in Denmark is only 170 metres. The most important hill in Danish cultural history, and the one with the most pretentious title, is called *Himmelbjerget*, (English: *Sky Mountain*), and it measures only 147 metres. The hills and the lack of mountains are important for the understanding of Denmark by both Danes and foreigners. The Norwegian author and mountain guide [*sic*], Roger Pihl, has published an excellent book with the ironical title *Guide til Danmarks bjerge* (English: *Guide to the Mountains of Denmark*), in which he portrays the Danish landscape, its place in Danish cultural history, and the Danes’ relationship to it. So, if students are to learn about the topography of Denmark and its importance in Danish cultural history, it would be much more relevant to include *bæk*, *å* and *bakke* rather than *flod* and *bjerg* in the glossary.

In terms of urban planning and the representation of cities in the courses, we again saw how the templates reflect Spanish linguaculture rather than culturally ‘neutral’ terminology. The Spanish template showed a typical Spanish city represented by a picture of a Spanish *plaza* (English: *square*). When you visit a Spanish or Latin American city, you just have to ask for the *Plaza Mayor* (English: the main square) in Spain or *Plaza de Armas* in Latin America to find the city centre. These *plazas* may be large (as in Mexico City), or quite small, but they are the beating heart of any Spanish and Latin American city or town. Historically and culturally, the *plaza* served several purposes. It was where the town hall was placed and where the different branches of trade were to be found. It was also where all kinds of more or less official celebration took place – including the bullfights. Furthermore, and even today, the Spanish *plazas* are normally very beautiful with trees, flowers, fountains, bars and banks, which make them breathing spaces in the cities, where people meet at noon for lunch and in the evening for the tapas and wine or beer. Thus, the plazas serve an important socio-cultural purpose. Taken together, this explains very well why the Spanish templates chose a plaza for illustrating a city and how it is organised.

In Danish the word for *plaza* is *torv* (from Old Norse *torg,* via Old Russian *torgŭ* (English: *market square*)*,* from Mongolian *torok* (English: *silk*)) or *plads*. There are squares in Danish towns and cities, and historically they have shared some of the characteristics of the Spanish plazas (in earlier times they were used for court processes and the *ting* (English: *local council*) met there. More importantly, the *torv* was a place for trade, and – as is also indicated by the etymology of the word – the *torv* was primarily a place for markets, where traders and peasants offered their goods for sale from stalls and stands. However, only larger towns and cities (especially Copenhagen and Århus) had squares like these, and as the market square is not as important for the cities as it used to be, the Danish term *torv* does not imbed the same cultural connotations as the Spanish *plaza*. Therefore we could not use *torv* to represent Danish cities and towns in general, and we had to find another way to illustrate cities and towns and the ways in which they are organised.

On maps of Denmark, both road maps of the country side and street maps of cities, the sign † or + is often seen at the centre of cities, towns, and villages. The sign symbolises a church. There are 2354 churches in Denmark (January 2008) – approximately 1700 medieval churches, many of which were built in the 12th century, and some 700 more recent churches. The medieval churches were originally built for Catholic services, but after the Reformation in 1536, the churches have been used for Lutheran protestant services. Many Danish towns and villages developed in the middle ages, and all Danish cities have at least one church (or cathedral), and even very small villages have a church, which makes it the obvious choice for orientation in the city or town. The church does not have the same social function it used to have (even though 82.1 percent of the Danish population belong to the national church of Denmark (January 2008), most of them are ‘passive members’, who do not use the churches (apart from christenings, confirmations, weddings, and funerals)). Still, the churches are very visible signs of Danish cultural history as well as easily recognisable landmarks. So, instead of a *plaza* as an image of the centre of cities, towns, and villages, we decided to use the image of a church.

Identity documentation is an important means for defining a nation’s members, so we also had to introduce into the language course the ways in which this is done in Denmark, and again we found significant differences between the embedded cultural aspects of the Spanish template and the Danish linguaculture. The Spanish template showed a presentation of the official Spanish identity card, the*DNI* or *Documento nacional de identidad* that is an obligatory identity card in Spain for all persons above the age of 18. The DNI is issued by the Spanish Home Ministry with photo, signature and the Spanish text is in all the four Spanish national languages. Every Spanish citizen is liable to show their DNI on request in order to identify themselves. Some years ago the DNI even included the fingerprint of the person. When shopping in Spain and paying by credit card, even as a foreigner you are asked to show your DNI to identify yourself.

Denmark does not have an official identity card equivalent to the Spanish DNI. The closest we get to the DNI in a Danish context is the Danish*sygesikringsbevis*(English: health insurance certificate). The current national health insurance system dates back to 1971, and it ensures that all Danish citizens can get free medical treatment. The *sygesikringsbevis* certificate is issued by the local authorities, and it is a plastic card that every citizen receives (including all children). The card must be shown at the doctor’s and in hospitals. The *sygesikringsbevis* is becoming still more important as the amount of data in the chip increases. Even in Danish airports, you can use the *sygesikringsbevis* as an ID card together with your paper ticket when travelling by domestic flights. However, compared to the Spanish DNI, the Danish *sygesikringsbevis* is not an official ID card as it does not contain a photo, and it cannot be used in the same official situations as the Spanish DNI. For identification Danish citizens can also use their driver’s licence (Danish: *kørekort*). The driver’s licence has a photo of its owner (which makes it more appropriate for identification than the *sygesikringsbevis* in some situations) but since not all citizens have a driver’s licence it does not correspond to the DNI either. Finally, there is the passport, which is the most official Danish identification document (with both photo and signature), but it is not required that Danish citizens have a passport (unless they want to travel outside the Schengen-countries). Consequently, Denmark does not have an equivalent to the Spanish DNI. However, the *sygesikringsbevis* is both the closest we get to a national identity card, and an example of an important aspect of the Danish welfare state, and we therefore chose to use this as an example of an identity card.

When it came to family relations and the conceptualisation of families, we again saw the cultural differences between Spain and Denmark manifested in the choice of both images and words. The Spanish template showed a photo of a traditional Spanish family, consisting of the parents, the children and some of the grandparents. Today most Danish children live in similar nuclear families (a family that consists only of a husband, wife and children) (approximately 75 percent, according to the Danish encyclopaedia *Gyldendals Online Leksikon*), but there are also other forms of families. Danes rarely live in extended families (where the family living together consists not only of the parents and children but also of grandparents) anymore, but there are blended families (where one or both parents have children from previous marriages living with the family) and one-parent families as well. So, some modern families consist of the mother and her new husband, the father and his new wife, new sisters and brothers and four couples of grandparents. Family structures may be culturally, politically and religiously founded, and the appearance of new family forms causes new terms to emerge (such as *kernefamilie* (English: nuclear family), *halvsøster* (English: half-sister), *papmor* (English: literally *card-board mother*), etc.

Even the more traditional family terms needed for the glossary were difficult to translate. The English term *grandparents* and the Spanish *abuelos* can be translated into the Danish word *bedsteforældre*. *Bedsteforældre* is the only plural form of the noun, but the singular nouns, *bedstemor* or *bedstefar* (English: *grandmother* and *grandfather*) have been replaced in everyday language within the past decades with the more modern terms *mormor/farmor* (English: ‘*mother-mother’* and *‘father-mother’*) and *morfar/farfar* (English: *‘mother-father’* and *‘father-father’*), and some grandparents may feel offended if addressed as *bedstemor* or *bedstefar*, as they might feel that the word is old-fashioned and consequently designates old-fashioned people. However, the history of the usage of these two terms complicates matters: the words *farfar* and *farmor* are actually much older than *bedstefar* and *bedstemor* (they were used already in medieval legal documents). In the dialects of the Danish islands, *farfar* and *farmor* were the most commonly used terms from 1750-1945, and only by the end of the Second World War was *bedstefader* becoming commonly used. In Jutland the change to *bedstefar* and *bedstemor* happened earlier, and the terms were common already at the turn of the 20th century. From the 1970s onwards, the usage has again shifted back to *farfar* and *farmor,* but there are significant differences among the different parts of Denmark. And to complicate matters further, it is not unusual today for a child to have a *mormor* and a *morfar* (on the mother’s side) and a *bedstemor* and *bedstefar* (on the father’s side). This might be the case if the mother is from one of the islands or Copenhagen, and the father is from Jutland. But one still has to be careful as not all Jutlandic grandparents identify themselves with the Jutlandic, and therefore historically rural, *bedstemor* and *bedstefar*. So, in addition to the changes over time in the usage of the words for grandparents, there are also regional and local as well as demographic aspects to take into consideration when translating even everyday terms like *grandmother* and *grandfather*.

When moving to the field of politics and the state apparatus, the term *president* (English) and *presidente* (Spanish) were used in the glossary. This term is used for the head of state in a republic, and the equivalent word in Danish is *præsident*, and the word is used when talking about politics in other countries. However, as was the case with the words *flod* (English: *river*) and *bjerg* (English: *mountain*), it does not belong to the Danish vocabulary at levels A1 and A2 as it does not designate a central concept of Danish culture. Denmark is a constitutional monarchy, which means that the king or queen is the head of state, but the prime minister is head of government. Therefore, the most directly relevant political terms would be *konge* (English: *king*)*, dronning* (English: *queen*) and *statsminister* (English*: prime minister*). In a Danish context the word *præsident* would designate for example the head of an association (Danish or international) or a sports committee. So, even though the word is similar to the English and the Spanish, its meaning differs significantly. A more precise ‘translation’ in a Danish context would therefore be *statsminister*. (If *statsminister* is translated into Spanish, it will be *Presidente del Gobierno Danés*.)

**Conclusion**

This article illustrates that even within a well-established political framework concerning the importance of intercultural communication, the cultural foundation of actual language teaching is not always explicitly formulated. As an EU-funded research project, Europodians aims at integrating language and culture teaching, and the actual language courses have to reflect and incorporate cultural differences and intercultural competences even at beginner’s level. For the designers of the courses this means that ‘the third place’ should be strived for – even, and in particular, if it means overcoming the typical blindness to one’s own culture. Furthermore, we have indicated that cognitive metaphors and a common glossary are not adequate to ensure the comparability and consistency among courses in different language and different linguacultures: our examples illustrate some fundamental problems when ‘translating’ words from one linguaculture into another.

Through its broad cultural and linguistic composition, its conception of culture and its use of interactive media, Europodians constitutes as well-founded option for the promotion of intercultural competence and cross-cultural understanding among the EU countries. However, it requires a more thoroughly theorisation of the actual designing of the course to fully succeed, and we hope that this article has contributed to exactly that.

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1. The levels refer to the ”Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment” (CEFR). The use of this framework has been recommended by a European Union Council Resolution since 2001. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)