

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: ANALYSING A COURSE BOOK¹

**La competencia Comunicativa Intercultural en Español como
lengua Extranjera: Análisis de un libro de texto**

Nydia Johanna Rincón Morales **ABSTRACT**

profe.johannarincon@gmail.com

Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages
(Spanish and English), Universidad
Pedagógica y Tecnológica de
Colombia, Magister in Language
Teaching, Universidad Pedagógica y
Tecnológica de Colombia, 2018 MLA
scholarship recipient, Spanish and
Coffee, UK language teacher.

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This qualitative study seeks to describe how Intercultural Communicative Competence is portrayed in the SFL course book *Aula América 1*. Two data collection instruments were used: checklists and a questionnaire to identify the presence of ICC dimensions. The results of this research project revealed important aspects related to: the role of course books in the language classroom; the understanding of language and culture in Spanish as a Foreign Language teaching materials; and concerns regarding the need to identify, create, and adapt the linguistic content to promote intercultural encounters. Finally, the research findings constitute a contribution to the understanding of the ICC role in language materials that may benefit SFL teachers, researchers and publishing houses interested in the intercultural speaker model and the representation of cultural realities that foster ICC development.

Keywords: Intercultural communicative competence, SFL teaching, language course book, language and culture, content analysis.

¹Research Report

Resumen

Este estudio cualitativo busca describir cómo la competencia comunicativa intercultural se presenta en el libro de español como lengua extranjera *Aula América 1*. Dos instrumentos de recolección de datos fueron usados: listas de verificación y un cuestionario para identificar la existencia de las dimensiones de CCI. Los resultados de esta investigación revelaron aspectos importantes relacionados con: el papel de los libros en las clases de idiomas, el entendimiento de lengua y cultura en los materiales para la enseñanza de español como lengua extranjera, al igual que algunas consideraciones respecto a la necesidad de identificar, crear y adaptar contenidos lingüísticos que promuevan encuentros interculturales. Finalmente, los hallazgos de este estudio constituyen una contribución para entender el papel de CCI dentro de los libros de idiomas que podrán beneficiar a los profesores, investigadores y editoriales de ELE que estén interesados en el modelo de hablante intercultural y la representación de realidades culturales que promuevan el desarrollo de CCI.

Palabras clave: competencia comunicativa intercultural, enseñanza de ELE, el libro de idiomas, cultura y lenguaje, análisis de contenidos.

Introduction

Many changes have been occurring globally: different sectors of society, industry, health, politics, business, and education are affected by population mobility. In an increasingly interconnected world, where millions of people live far away from their native countries, learning a language has become a necessity. Consequently, there is a clear need for real and effective communication, where individuals are able to recognise values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of their own or other cultures. Spanish as Foreign Language (SFL) is not far from that massive migration flow. People from different cultural backgrounds are interested in learning this language for social, political, economic, educational, and technical reasons in Spanish speaking countries. For instance, in Colombia, Spanish as a Foreign Language is taught in more than thirty universities and various language academies. An increase in the number of SFL courses reveals that this area is on the rise with more and more students interested in learning SFL in Latin America.

Due to massive mobilization and sociocultural encounters between Spanish

speaking countries, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is gaining more and more significance in the educational agenda. The Common European Framework of References for Languages (2002) and such prestigious institutions as the Instituto Cervantes (2008) and Instituto Caro y Cuervo from Colombia have recognized the importance of fostering a cultural reality based on knowledge, skills, and attitudes based on the Intercultural Communicative Competence.

Bearing in mind the increase of SFL courses in Colombia, it is crucial to have contextualized learning materials connected to sociocultural realities, such as course books that represent, impact, and lead the process of SFL learning. Because of this, I decided to develop a research project that analysed a language course book as a way of contributing to the understanding of Intercultural Communicative Competence in the SFL context. Therefore, this research report describes a qualitative study focused on presentation aspects of ICC, *Savoirs*, and material development. For this study, the presence of ICC was analysed in a widely used SFL course book titled *Aula América 1*. Based on the previous, results are gained on

the way ICC was portrayed in the book.

Given these points, the conclusions drawn from the analysis may constitute a significant contribution to the development of new methodological perspectives of the design, assessment, and adaptation of language materials that may benefit other language teachers, researchers, and materials developers interested in strengthening SFL teaching and learning in Latin America.

Theoretical Framework

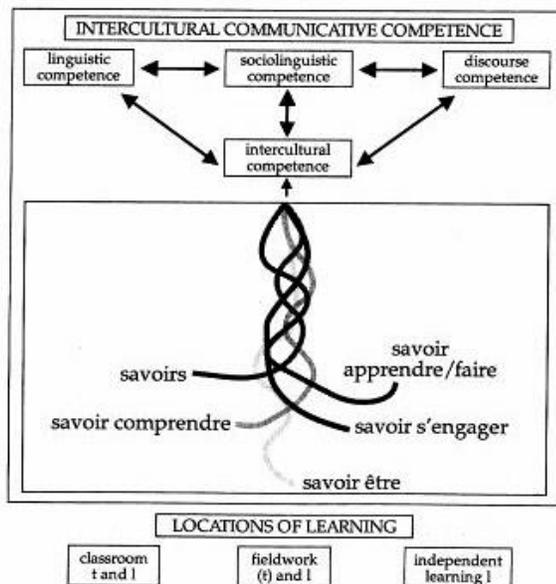
Understanding Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural Communicative Competence has been defined in multiple ways since the 1990s, when it first emerged as a means to unite similar concepts among existing models. For instance, Howard-Hamilton, Richardson, and Shuford (1998) created a list of competence components based on attitudes, knowledge, and skills; representing a more specific range of actions, self-reflections, and multiple perspectives. Deardorff (2009) attempted to merge elements like knowledge and skills, which presupposed attitudinal dispositions and collective attitudes. Fantini (1995) proposed a worldview process where individuals' perspectives increasingly showed co-

orientation through competent interaction. Kupka (as cited in Deardorff, 2009, pp. 18-19) defined intercultural communicative competence based upon three outcomes: impressions of appropriateness and effectiveness, awareness and agreement on diverse meaning systems, and mutual relationship satisfaction.

The core and common components mentioned throughout most models are motivation, knowledge, skills, context, participants' relationship, interaction process, and outcomes. At the same time, the variety in these intercultural components are representative of the diverse ways of perceiving cultural understanding. In terms of the language classroom, it is necessary to consider an ICC model that can be understood and adapted. For this reason, Byram (1997) carried out one of the most exhaustive efforts to develop a conceptual model of ICC and the understanding of cultural encounters. Byram (1997) considered it necessary to redefine the relationship between his model of ICC and the competences in Van Ek's language-based model (1991). He also replaced the concept of native speaker with intercultural speaker, as well as prioritising words like discovery, interpretation, and relationship. Additionally, Byram (1997) proposed five *Savoirs*

involved in the Intercultural Competence,



which were used and understood for the aim of this research in the following way:

Figure 1. Model of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997, p. 73).

First, Byram (1997) defined attitudes (*savoir être*) as “curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own” (p. 50). For example, when adapting or designing language materials, publishing houses, teachers, and researchers have to avoid prejudice, inequality, stereotypes, and shortages in cultural variety. A lack of any of these elements in language teaching material may result in an unsuccessful interaction. SFL course books need to provoke daily life

experience sharing among intercultural speakers, be interested in others’ opinions on familiar and unfamiliar issues, and take into consideration expectations about appropriate behaviour in a particular situation.

Second, Byram (1997) described knowledge (*savoirs*) as being part “of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction” (p. 51). For instance, activities should allow students to become informed and relate information about their own countries and others. Intercultural speakers should be able to share their understanding about a variety of social groups, geography, stories, and governmental issue in regard to national memories and history.

Third, the skills of interpreting and relating are stated as (*savoir comprendre*), which is the “ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one’s own” (p. 52). What this means is that SFL material should encourage students to identify prejudices and judgements about another’s culture based on preconceptions of one’s own culture. Specifically, when students develop course book activities, they need to be

flexible in communicating and interacting with people from different cultures and languages regardless of the situation.

Fourth, the skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*) are defined as the “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” (p. 52). For instance, materials may allow students to identify contemporary, as well as historical relationships, between cultures. Likewise, they are expected to behave according to the verbal and nonverbal interaction in real-time situations. SFL course books should allow students to share their opinions while contrasting different cultures.

Finally, critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) refers to “an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries” (p. 63). This refers to identifying, interpreting, and being aware of values in events or potential conflicts between ideologies. In relation to course books, activities have to reflect differences among languages, cultures, social issues, and

multiple cultural identities, such as race, class, gender, age, etc.

It is essential to clarify that all the *Savoirs* explained above were taken into account in this research project as observable indicators that determined whether Intercultural Communicative Competence was considered and included in the course book under analysis. Overall, the study aimed at gaining insights on the way ICC could be identified, understood, and promoted in language teaching course books.

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The intercultural communicative competence dimension in SFL course books development. Despite the fact that there are various kinds of things used as materials for language teaching, the most extensively preferred are course books. Cunningsworth (1995) stated that course books are one of the key components of teaching foreign languages because they provide the necessary materials to present contents and communicative practice. In addition, he noticed that course books are a methodological guide that allows teachers to

structure courses and save time preparing classes. Ur (1999) also described course books as “textbooks of which the teachers and usually each student has a copy, and which is in principle to be followed systematically as the basis for a language course” (p. 183).

Similarly, in 2008, the SFL didactic journal *Marco ELE* published an interview with representatives of the main SFL publishing houses (Anaya ELE, Difusión, Edelsa, Edinumen, Enclave ELE, Español Santillana, SGEL, and SM-ELE). Based on the interview, the conclusion was that course books should be understood as a platform for teachers and students to structure a course. They also asserted that a course book is a tool that guides the didactic itinerary carried out in class and, at the same time, a source in which students can find language samples, exercises, activities, and explanations. Likewise, Rico (2012) considered books as influential tools that function as sociocultural mediators making intercultural encounters possible. He also stated that “materials promote mutual understanding, seeing them as powerful tools to deal with cultural diversity” (p. 90).

Based on the points mentioned above, the process of analysing and selecting books

is crucial. Some researchers have addressed the process of SFL course book analysis (Barroso et al., 2008; Díaz, 2016; Espejo, Flórez, & Zambrano, 2011; Gómez & Mahecha, 2016; González, 2015; Illescas, 2015; & Rico, 2012). Unfortunately, in the national and international spheres, few recent theoretical reference studies exist that specifically deal with the intercultural communicative competence approach in SFL course books. Even less studies are available on the development of an intercultural speaker model and the analysis of language teaching materials under the ICC perspective.

Some relevant studies about Spanish course books in connection with ICC. Níkleva (2012) studied the intercultural competence and its didactic development in nineteen SFL textbooks published between 1992 and 2010 in Spain, the United Kingdom, and Bulgaria. Firstly, the researcher reviewed the *Instituto Cervantes* curriculum and designed a cultural contents classification. Then, she analysed the cultural contents in the language textbooks and carried out a comprehensive assessment. After, she compared how often the cultural content was displayed throughout the book, the content variety according to the year of publication, the role of stereotypes in the book activities, the relationship between

the cultural content and the authors' nationality, and the integration of language and culture in the course books. She indicated different conclusions. First, the frequency of cultural content did not increase in the most current course books, even though ICC has become progressively important in the last years. Second, in all the newest textbooks the presentation of cultural stereotypes has changed, becoming symbols of identity and cultural significance. Third, intercultural awareness was a transversal axis, in which the contents and activities dedicated to culture encouraged comparison and critical reflection. In her conclusions, I realised the importance of exploring the way in which ICC was portrayed in the SFL course book *Aula América 1*. Even when books include a section to tackle cultural awareness, it does not necessarily mean that those activities develop students' Intercultural Communicative Competence. On the contrary, they can end up reinforcing stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings.

In a second international research, Spychala (2008) analysed five course books levels used by secondary school students in Wielkopolska, Poland. The books included *Cumbre, Español* (2000) and *Para Empezar- Esto funciona, Ven* (2000). The researcher focused on identifying the cultural content

and types of cultural elements, skills, and attitudes in the course books. The study detected the different contexts included in the books, and it concluded that Polish and Spanish course books were filled with cultural elements. However, the way culture was introduced did not necessarily meet the objectives of intercultural competence materials. The author also concluded that activities need to be thought as useful didactic tools that foster intercultural sensitivity.

Additionally, Illescas (2015) examined the way ICC theoretical and methodological frameworks were applied to four SFL course books used in Spain and the United States. The researcher assessed students' ICC development after using the course books. After the individual analysis of the SFL course books, the results demonstrated that the materials failed to include the cultural component in the curricular design. The researcher pointed out the effort that publishing houses made to adapt materials to the CEFR guidelines and *Instituto Cervantes* curriculum plan. However, the results confirmed that there is much work left to be done in making sure that cultural contents are not seen as marginal elements without relation to the rest of the book content. In the same way, it was worth

mentioning that elements of deep culture were missing in the book activities, which would have certainly contributed to the development of ICC.

In the national sphere, Rico (2012) developed a doctoral research study at a university in the United Kingdom. His main interest was to search for ways in which language materials from SFL course books promoted the development of students' intercultural communicative competence. In particular, he intended to tailor language materials, identify principles for ICC development, outline a methodology used in material adaptation, and assess the materials under the ICC perspective. Rico's action research study was conducted in three cycles: Reconnaissance, Intervention, and Evaluation. In the first cycle, the problem was recognised, a student questionnaire was administered, a 'culture bump activity' was executed, and course books were evaluated. In the second cycle, the materials were developed and evaluated selecting the didactic units to be adapted. Additionally, the adaptation techniques were defined and applied. Finally, the third cycle involved material evaluation through student observation, a teacher's checklist, and a students' portfolio.

Rico's (2012) research study relied on Byram, Nichols, and Stevens' (2001) ICC theory, as well as Tomlinson's (2003) Text-Driven Approach, and Bennett's (1998) Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The results of the study came to the following conclusions:

- a) The materials adapted helped students develop the dimensions of ICC *savoirs*: *Savoir* (knowledge), *savoir s'engager* (awareness), *savoir faire* (skills), *savoir être* (attitudes), and *savoir communiquer* (proficiency).
- b) Students were more interested in those activities in which they obtained information about cultural artefacts.
- c) Students revealed positive and critical attitudes towards language learning and cultures.

The main contribution of his study was the identification of some principles for developing ICC materials and the recognition of methodologies that can be used in materials development through a text-driven approach (TDA) and task-based learning (TBL). For this research study, I considered the previous in order to identify ICC

indicators in the course book content.

Research Design

This study was based on a qualitative research methodology following Creswell (2012). The research study was specifically focused on exploring the development of the five *Savoirs* in an SFL course book as the central phenomenon requiring exploration and understanding. This qualitative methodology was best suited to address concern when considering the ICC component when teaching SFL. A better understanding of ICC components can help avoid cultural misunderstandings that arise in different social encounters. Taking on the role of teacher-researcher, I was able to contribute my understanding of ICC in order to select suitable course books for SFL teaching and learning.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Previous research studies have based their selection criteria on Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) because it describes the systematic examination, verification, and reporting of data found in different language materials. Schreier (2012) defined Content Analysis as a method for systematically describing qualitative material by classifying parts and differentiating them in categories

within a framework of coding. For this project, a research question was stated in relation to ICC and language materials; an SFL course book was selected; and a coding frame was established and adapted for material evaluation. The subsequent analysis was carried out by applying the same descriptors and codes to the course book and questionnaire. Later, the coding was analysed and interpreted considering the particular components of ICC and how the different *savoirs* were represented. The aim of the questionnaire was to consider teachers' views of how the intercultural component in the SFL course book *Aula América 1* was evidenced. Finally, conclusions and further considerations were discussed.

Data Collection Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect data: checklists and a questionnaire. Two different checklists were used for material evaluation. This instrument was part of the observation and evaluation process as I consistently and purposefully took notes of the particular dimensions of ICC found throughout the course book. It was necessary to have two different checklists: the first checklist was more exhaustive and structured. It was used to identify the presence, frequency, and occurrence of

observable ICC indicators throughout the nine units. The second checklist was more open-ended because it allowed me to take general notes, write comments, and characterise specific examples related to the observable indicators concerning the identification and analyses of each one of the ICC dimensions.

The second instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) considered that questionnaires had to be clear in terms of the research purposes. This means that questions must be designed in order to obtain the most appropriate data for the study. In this case, I decided to create a questionnaire to collect data that would provide different points of view concerning the same phenomenon. Additionally, the questionnaire was administered online. The questionnaire was divided in four main sections: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and intercultural awareness with the purpose of validating whether other teachers could identify the ICC components in the SFL course book. After designing the questionnaire, I piloted, refined, and administered the questions to three teachers who have used the SFL course book *Aula América 1* as their main language resource.

Coding Process

The content analysis process is concerned with meaning, intentions, consequences, and context through data analysis in an objective and systematic way (Cavanagh, 1997, p. 5). For this qualitative study, the content analysis started with the selection of the unit of analysis guided by the research questions. The unit of analysis was words or sentences related to observable indicators in relation to the ICC dimensions in *Aula América 1*. Furthermore, I applied some coding frames that were registered in the first checklist to identify the presence, frequency, or occurrence of observable indicators of ICC dimensions throughout the nine units. Additionally, categorisations of course book ICC descriptors were recorded in the second checklist according to each one of the *savoirs*. Moreover, the questionnaire was analysed using the coding frame to triangulate the researcher's view with the teachers' perceptions, who have used the course book *Aula América 1*. The focus of the units, aims of the activities, and teacher's manual were also considered whilst the categorisation took place.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the research study were presented in categories and subcategories that were the result of a qualitative content analysis of the data gathered. This was followed by a data analysis and priori categories based on the theoretical framework in order to describe how Intercultural Communicative Competence was portrayed in the SFL course book *Aula América 1* and determine how the course book accounted for the development of ICC.

First Category: Describing and Understanding ICC Components

First subcategory: Attitudes (savoir être). Throughout the course book units, different activities were analysed for observable indicators in which students could appreciate and value their own and other Latin American countries' cultures. It was necessary to divide this subcategory into three sections: 1. *Value cultures.* 2. *Express your ideas.* 3. *Suspend judgement* to present the finding in depth.

Section 1: Value cultures. Regarding the analysis of the different activities in which students could value Latin American countries' culture, as well as their own culture, it was important to identify statements of valorisation of otherness and

suggestions to integrate other values from students' own culture. In this case, the activities and tasks included under this premise asked students to think, describe, search, consider, determine, assess, classify, mention, decide, and analyse ideas related to different cultures. Although the course book does not explicitly present other cultural identities apart from the Spanish-speaking countries' culture, the learners have the opportunity to interpret and comment on familiar and unfamiliar phenomena in relation to their own cultural practices with their classmates.

Given the previous, some activities presented daily experiences from a range of social groups. This allowed students to value Latin American cultures while changing their points of view and creating new perspectives about their own and others' cultures. Particularly, the learners were guided to a critical view of various situations, which required the appropriation of self-identity and the ability to accept and interpret other cultures (Byram, 1997). This standpoint was also confirmed by the questionnaire item related to attitudes, which asked teachers if they had identified activities in where students changed their perceptions about Latin American cultures. Teachers agreed that students' attitude in regard to avoiding

generalisation about traditions and cultures have improved after developing the activities in the course book.

The goal of all course book activities should be to guide students to take on a cultural mediator role in situations of tension, conflict, and misunderstanding between their own and the target culture. I think that it is important to establish language activities that allow students to appreciate their own identity but, at the same time, value other cultures. This could be achieved through readings, pictures, and dialogues that avoid bias or discrimination against other countries and minorities. Likewise, inclusion and understanding of others could be promoted.

Section 2: Express your ideas. The course book also included different activities in which students could express their opinions, views, needs, and wants about the subjects presented. The results from the data analysis showed that the students' voices were slightly heard when they needed to communicate their thoughts, inquiries, wants and needs. To decide on this aspect, the instructions for the activities included in the teachers' manuals were also taken into account. They confirmed whether there was any other guidance about communicating necessity and desires. The majority of the course book statements asked students to talk

about general topics. They did not encourage students to take on a critical view about certain concerns or communicate their needs. As a consequence, I consider that the activities are meant to place students in deal contexts where no problems, difficulties or concerns exist. This poses an issue when the learner faces difficult situation under real-life social encounters. Under these considerations, Byram (1997) stated that "...willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one's own environment" (p. 58).

Section 3: Suspend judgement.

Byram (1997) expressed that there was a need for students to reach the level of critical awareness and to consider other identities, beliefs, and values in reference to their own. A way to include this in a language course book is through activities which allow students to place themselves in the others' shoes, accept others without trying to change them, and avoid assumptions about the way people look like. The content analysis applied to the course book *Aula América I* showed a lack of instruction when addressing cultural encounters. Consequently, it generated misunderstanding about the others, judgements about people's preferences, and offensive messages because the instructions were unclear in terms of different cultural

practices.

I also noticed that many activities presented cultural aspects in a superficial way. They assumed people have a single way of life. Without a well-structured guidance to accompany each activity, students might impose their ways of being over others.

Second subcategory: Knowledge (savoir). The course book *Aula América 1* presents some elements related to the knowledge students may have about their own culture and the target culture. Observable indicators in relation to this ICC component were present in activities in which students contrasted aspects from the Spanish language and culture with their own. In this case, they had to know about the essential norms and taboos (greetings, dress, behaviour, etc.) of their own culture and the other culture, as well as describe the other's and their own behaviours in various domains (e.g., social interaction, time orientation, relation to the environment, etc.).

Only a few examples were found in relation to contrasting one's culture with the others or showing diversity in ways of life and sociocultural contexts where the language is spoken. Additionally, knowledge was mostly limited to activities in which culture was assessed by means of testing, short answers, and pairing items. All of these

aimed at measuring the acquisition of cultural facts. In addition, most of the activities required students to identify similar or different cultural elements through reorganising, regrouping or comparing different characteristics from one social group. Conversely, I think that the dimension of knowledge should go beyond the elements mentioned above and incorporate the awareness of diversity in ways of life and culture, such as gestures, customs, rituals, educational systems, social classes, gender, religion, accents, and transportation use.

In terms of activities where students could recognise signs of cultural stress, there was no evidence that this part was included as one of the ICC indicators. Furthermore, just a few activities allowed students to expand their understanding of their host and own culture through general history and socio-political factors, which have shaped different cultures. Likewise, these findings were in line with both teachers' opinions on the cultural knowledge part of the questionnaire and the second checklist. They both stated that the course book exhibits a variety of culture from Latin American countries. It presents a section at the end of the units called "*Palabras y sus variantes*" with the aim of showing that differences enrich communication among speakers.

(*Aula América 1*, p. 2).

Third subcategory: Skills (*savoir comprendre*) (*savoir apprendre/faire*). Subsequently, this category intended to see if the course book included activities that allowed students to develop their abilities of interpreting, relating, discovering, and interacting with others. *Aula América 1* contains only a few documents and events from other cultures. Similarly, in the teacher's manual, there was no explicit information about how to address activities that enabled students to relate information with other texts about their own culture. Conversely, the different texts and events were rich in different cultural contents; for example, they presented dialogues with a variety of accents, vocabulary, and expressions. The purpose was for students to understand the flexibility in communicating with those who are linguistically and culturally different. I consider that there are a lot of activities, statements, and texts that could be used in a better way to make students relate what they are observing and what they are learning with elements of their own culture. In that sense, their language learning process becomes a meaningful experience to develop the Intercultural Communicative Competence.

During the majority of the analysis. I

found that the emphasis was more on the linguistic aspects of the language, which reinforced native-like communication during an established interaction. Nevertheless, the ICC components suggest the necessity of adjusting to different sociocultural environments. For example, activities, such as casual conversations, chatting, gossiping, and storytelling, should allow learners to function, interact, and mediate in intercultural exchanges with different communities defined by age group, social class, gender, ethnicity, profession, or leisure interest (Corbett, 2003).

Fourth subcategory: Critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*). Finally, under the description and understanding of the last ICC components, the finding showed that the course book does not include activities or events in which the learners have the opportunity to consciously pay attention to the similarities and differences between their native and target culture. In unit four and eight, there are some instructions about language differences, which allow students to think about their own language and Spanish from other Latin American countries. However, there is a lack of evidence that the activity intended to achieve this goal. In contrast, units four, six, and nine only have one activity that allows

students to establish connections between the two cultures and reflect about the ways they view themselves within a different culture.

Likewise, another finding referred to identifying activities in which students could reflect on issues or situations. This standpoint was established by the questionnaire item related to cultural awareness. For this item, teachers were asked to recognise the different cultural identities throughout the units, as well as the social issues presented to develop students' intercultural communicative competence. The data analysis revealed a lack of variety in cultural identities throughout the nine units. For example, the people shown in the book possess neutral characteristics; they do not have different sexual orientations, they are not older than fifty, and they do not have physical or mental limitations or special needs. Thus, the people displayed in the course book reinforce an ideal way of seeing cultural encounters through a superficial way. Tourist travelling around different Latin American countries, buying handicrafts, dancing salsa, eating *tamales*, and enjoying the beaches without having any linguistic concerns or issues will have a difficult time interacting with other speakers.

As previously illustrated, I consider that ICC activities need to have a general

understanding of the nature of language and realistic attitudes towards language learning and cultural encounters. The language and cultural awareness component would be developed if course books included activities where students could reflect on their points of view about social issues in their and other Latin American countries' cultures, such as climate change, poverty, food crisis, etc. Moreover, it is important to clarify that cultural awareness manifests itself when people interact with others from different cultures. Unfortunately, a lack of cultural encounters throughout the coursebook leads to an inability to interpret and evaluate culture from different perspectives, which also affects the development of the ICC cultural awareness component.

Second Category: The Language Course Book as a Powerful Tool for ICC Development

Despite the wide variety of teaching materials, resources, and new technology in the language classroom, the course book remains as a central and powerful pedagogical tool for students and teachers in the foreign language learning process. As previously discussed in this article and other studies, the importance of the intercultural component in teaching foreign languages has

considerably increased in recent years. Likewise, the majority of foreign language programs emphasize that students need to acquire the target culture from an intercultural perspective taking into account the context in which they are immersed. However, the intercultural dimension seems to be lacking in language materials like course books.

First subcategory: Some reflections in relation to cultural indicators. *Aula América I* is made up of nine units with a total of 117 pages. The contents in the units present communicative, grammatical, and lexical resources; but the cultural subject is not mentioned in this section. In spite of being a book recently adapted to the new communicative and sociocultural approaches as the authors' state, *Aula América I* incorporates cultural aspects in an isolated section in the last part of each unit with the title *Travel*. From Rico-s (2012) considerations, the perspectives of other studies, and my own understanding, I consider that culture should not be presented as an additional section in the teaching material because it reinforces the idea that the linguistic competence is detached from the reality where the language is spoken. On the contrary, the ICC component should be integrated into each one of the language

experiences. By doing so, students are encouraged to communicate using grammatical patterns, but also interact, adjust, integrate, interpret and negotiate in different situations, as stated by Byram (1997).

Beginning with the front cover, the course book gives an idea of how Latin American culture will be displayed inside the book. For instance, the front cover places culture in a prominent position by showing a picture of corn (*maíz*) with a variety of colours. Keeping in mind that corn is an important and traditional element of Latin American cuisine and its history, it could be interpreted as a metaphor for the richness of learning a language spoken by 19 countries in all of its cultural representations. Along the same lines, the title of the book complements this idea since it claims to address Spanish spoken throughout the Americas. Additionally, the word *Aula* implies that the book is meant to be used in the classroom. Byram (1997) considered that language learning in the classroom has its advantages because it provides a space for a systematic and structure presentation of knowledge, as well as the development of skills with the help of a guide (teacher).

Based on the previous, the classroom should be a place where learners can link

language acquisition with the experience of cultural encounters. Without leaving the classroom, learners can be engaged in activities that promote discussing, interpreting, understanding, and communicating ideas which might address ICC. Thus, I have noticed that there are different activities and topics that account for the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence. Some of the most popular topics displayed in the Spanish beginners' content was personal information, hobbies, likes and preferences, cities and tourist places, clothing, family, music, films and daily routines. Remarkably, many relevant topics that would have addressed ICC development were absent. Topics like education, society, economy, lifestyles, politics, national symbols, beliefs, religion, immigrants, laws, crime, poverty, traditions, history, comparison of different cultures, environment, and stereotypes were missing from the book. Bearing this in mind, Gómez (2015) also concluded in his study that language materials present idealistic contexts represented by surface culture features, which are insufficient for learners to understand the target language when interacting in real situations.

Second subcategory: Audio-visual

content. The audio-visual content that accompanies the different units features photographs, videos, audio recordings, and cartoons. The material illustrates a wide section of the population that ranges in age from early twenties to sixties. Additionally, it represents a variety of racial backgrounds; although, people with dark/brown skin are significantly prominent over people with fair skin colour. This reinforces the stereotype that Latin American people look a certain way. Furthermore, a close analysis of the different illustrations suggests that images introduce a variety of contexts, places, and topics that go beyond a touristic way of perceiving the language. The images orient the learners toward recognising contemporary information, such as music festivals, TV series, entertainment, fashion, history, architecture, and science. Nonetheless, I consider that the display of different pictures related to cultural information does not mean that students are aware of the different cultural identities. Throughout the analysis of the course book and the teacher's manual, I realised that most of the activities do not explore the illustration deeply; instead, the images function as a companion to the text. ICC course books should allow learners to reflect on how the context can affect or alter interaction with

others and analyse how they view themselves within their own or a different culture.

Particularly, the pictures, videos, audio recordings, and cartoons failed to include the students' own cultures or that of any other non-Spanish speaking country. Language course books should include audio-visual content from other countries and cultures to promote students' critical engagement with otherness and a critical reflection of the self. Corbett (2003) claimed that "Pictures can be used as data for the exploration of social issues in the home and target cultures. Over time, learners may come up with their own ideas, prompted by their own observations and interests" (p. 141). I consider that the use and exploration of images from the native and target culture are a great way to start developing ICC in the language classroom. A positive aspect of *Aula América I*, which I would like to mention, is the variety of Spanish accents represented in the audio recordings. Although, the book specifies the target countries that might be benefited from using this material, many Latin American Spanish-speakers actively perform in the listening exercises. This variety helps students become aware of the richness of the Spanish language (accents, ways of approaching, politeness, humour, etc.). Additionally, students can

understand cultural differences from one country to another, as well as value a language learning that immerses them in a globalized world through sociocultural encounters.

Conclusions and Implications

Several conclusions and implications emerged after carrying out this research study. In relation to language course books, it is necessary to clarify that although books play an important role in the process of language learning, teachers cannot rely only on the course book as the only material for ICC development. The certainty of this conclusion comes from the idea that the world is changing rapidly. Mobility and technology are increasing on a daily basis. Thus, it is difficult to establish only one source for language teaching. For this reason, the learning process should be supported by other didactic materials, fieldwork, and independent learning (Byram, 1997).

In terms of the book content, *Aula América I* has deficiencies in establishing objectives and ways of assessing the different ICC components. This SFL course book only mentions the communicative, grammatical and lexical components, leaving aside the intercultural competence. In every learning and teaching practice, objectives are a crucial

aspect in the success of the lessons. Language course books need to explicitly state the intercultural communicative objectives in each one of their units, so that teachers and learners have an idea of what will be achieved and how they will be evaluated.

Second, the course book's topics and activities should promote discussion, interpretation, understanding, and communication of ideas that represent students' realities whilst leading to the development of ICC. Topics and activities related to education, society, economy, politics, beliefs, religion, immigrants, laws, crime, poverty, traditions, history, etc. enhance opinion sharing and cultural awareness. In many language course books, social life is represented in a simplistic and superficial way, which denies students the possibility to reflect on cultural differences or perceive the richness of their own or others' cultures.

Third, language course book developers need to pay more attention to the way culture is conceived by the teachers and learners. A cultural representation cannot be limited by some pictures of food, beaches, and flags. Intercultural communicative course books need to consider norms and taboos, greetings, different clothing, and behaviour, etc. from the target language and

the students' own culture. By doing so, stereotypes are avoided. If students are able to visualise different cultural identities, different issues, and social situations, they will be able to compare different cultures in a respectful and informed way.

Fourth, some of the different *savoirs* were present in the SFL course book, although, they lacked instructions for teachers to lead the development of the components. It is important that teachers' guides and material designing programs are provided with explicit instructions on how to address, adapt, and create materials that enhance ICC development. For example, in regard to (*savoir être*) attitudes, it is important to establish activities that allow students to appreciate their own identity, while valuing other cultures. This could be achieved through texts that present reality in a wider spectrum like including minority groups. Course books should also allow students the space to question their own culture. Just because another culture does not have the same values, customs, traditions, etc., it does not mean that it is inferior or incorrect.

Another example of including the (*savoir comprendre*), or the interpreting and relating component, in course book activities is by displaying a variety of illustrations that

go beyond naming objects or places. Language materials that contains ICC components can take a common topic and transform it into a tool to interpret different perspectives. For example, when talking about clothing, the material should present a variety of fashion styles that students do not know or understand. In this way, when learners are asked about what they or other people are wearing, students will not judge or believe that one fashion taste and standard is better than another. On the contrary, they might make contrasts and become aware of other perspectives (Byram, 1997).

Fifth, the publishing houses, researchers, teachers, and material developers need to evaluate and carefully analyse the intercultural content within the course books before launching or using them. In this sense, the course book becomes the result of the work of an academic community, where everybody is given the opportunity to construct knowledge, instead of a product that a few design and others adopt (Agray, 2008). In short, the Intercultural Communicative Competence could be gained by the learners through the course books if the content presents a sufficient level of activities, exercises, and suitable materials. Language learners need to be exposed to cultural components as much

as they can. Researchers should keep searching for appropriate materials that enhance the acquisition of ICC. Consequently, learners communicative process would be much more productive and fruitful.

Finally, as previously stated, it is important to keep in mind that ICC goes far beyond the mere learning of linguistic patterns or memorization of cultural facts. If the intention is to develop an intercultural awareness that help learners approach unknown situations without prejudice, there should be more activities that promote intercultural reflection, respect, and equality. In other words, if we would like to be part of a society based on tolerance and solidarity, teacher-researchers and material developers should turn their language resources and classrooms into territories of sociocultural encounters.

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