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**THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURALITY
IN THE TRAINING OF THE TRANSLATOR
AND INTERPRETER**

**LA IMPORTANCIA DE LA INTERCULTURALIDAD EN
LA FORMACIÓN DEL TRADUCTOR E INTÉRPRETE**

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The Importance of Interculturality in the Training of the Translator and Interpreter

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ABSTRACT

Over recent decades, interculturality has become a globally relevant concern, driven by continuous social transformation, increasing mobility, and the intensification of international connections. These changes have reshaped patterns of communication and interaction across societies, making intercultural competence an essential component of contemporary education. In this scenario, intercultural education needs to be articulated through discipline-specific objectives so that it can support effective cross-cultural interaction and contribute to positive social, educational, and economic outcomes. This focus is particularly relevant in disciplines grounded in cultural contact — such as translation and interpreting — because language and culture are inseparable. In these professions, language does more than convey information; it also transmits cultural meanings, values, norms, and sociocultural references linked to each speech community (Yahia, 2013). As a result, translators and interpreters must navigate not only linguistic differences but also culturally embedded ways of understanding and interpreting reality. Accordingly, they require not only strong linguistic proficiency but also robust intercultural competence to mediate across cultures in a context-sensitive and ethically responsible manner. For these reasons, this article discusses how culture and interculturality are understood in translation and interpreting, reviews the role of language in producing and transmitting cultural meaning, outlines core components of intercultural competence for these professionals, and suggests strategies to integrate interculturality more systematically into academic and professional training.

Keywords: culture; education; cultural differences; intercultural education; vocational training.

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RESUMEN

En las últimas décadas, la interculturalidad se ha convertido en un eje central de alcance global, impulsado por transformaciones sociales continuas y por la intensificación de los vínculos internacionales. Ante este escenario, la educación intercultural requiere formularse mediante objetivos concretos en cada disciplina, de modo que favorezca interacciones eficaces entre culturas y contribuya a resultados positivos en los planos social, educativo y económico. Esta mirada es especialmente pertinente en áreas donde el contacto entre culturas forma parte del quehacer cotidiano, como la traducción y la interpretación, debido al vínculo inseparable entre lengua y cultura. En estos ámbitos, la lengua no solo transmite información: también vehicula significados culturales, valores, normas y referencias socioculturales propias de cada comunidad lingüística (Yahia, 2013). Por ello, quienes traducen o interpretan necesitan, además del dominio lingüístico, una competencia intercultural sólida que les permita mediar entre culturas de forma pertinente y situada. En consecuencia, este artículo revisa las nociones de cultura e interculturalidad en la traducción y la interpretación; analiza el papel de la lengua en la construcción y transmisión del sentido cultural; identifica componentes clave de la competencia intercultural en dichos perfiles profesionales; y plantea estrategias para integrar la interculturalidad de manera sistemática en su formación académica y profesional.

Palabras clave: cultura; educación; diferencias culturales; educación intercultural; formación profesional.

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INTRODUCTION

Interculturality has become a key topic in contemporary education, largely because cultural diversity is increasingly visible in everyday social life. Initial academic work in this area took shape in Europe and later extended to Latin America, where it has grown notably over the last two decades (Trejo et al., 2017). This body of research calls for a rethinking of conventional educational approaches so that schools and universities can respond to the challenges — and possibilities — created by intercultural encounters.

In practice, interculturality has often been developed mainly within language education. In that setting, learners are encouraged to build their identities from local cultural frameworks while remaining open to other perspectives and broader global viewpoints. The goal is to promote respect for diversity and to develop communication skills that extend beyond grammar and vocabulary to include attitudes, values, and interactional abilities. However, in the Mexican context, intercultural approaches have frequently centered on native and indigenous cultures; as a consequence, interculturality understood from an international perspective has received less sustained attention, especially in disciplines that require systematic engagement with multiple cultural systems (Trejo et al., 2017).

A major driver of these educational demands is market internationalization, which has expanded economic, academic, and professional exchanges across borders. This trend is closely tied to cultural globalization, through which ideas, values, and communicative practices circulate widely. Migration also contributes to intensified diversity by increasing the frequency and complexity of intercultural contact in daily life (Paricio, 2014). In this context, education cannot be detached from the social and professional realities that graduates will face. When intercultural education is weak, academic knowledge may be applied without the tools needed to respond effectively to contemporary demands. These issues are evident in foreign language education and become even more critical in translation and interpreting, since both professions work at the intersection of languages and cultures. Practitioners are expected not only to render linguistic content but also to negotiate cultural meanings, values, and communicative norms. For this reason, intercultural education should be considered a core component of professional preparation in these fields (González, 2018).



Nevertheless, intercultural competence is often developed only indirectly through language study, which reduces opportunities for explicit practice, reflection, and assessment in training programs (Giralt, A., 2020).

To address this gap, the present article examines the implications of intercultural competence for translation and interpreting. It reviews key perspectives on culture and interculturality, discusses how language participates in cultural meaning, and highlights the relevance of intercultural education for professional training. Ultimately, it aims to support more comprehensive models that prepare future practitioners to navigate intercultural communication in an increasingly globalized environment.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a narrative documentary review design to bring together key conceptual and pedagogical work on interculturality and intercultural competence in translator and interpreter education. A narrative approach fits this topic because the literature spans diverse sources: conceptual debates, teaching proposals, and empirical studies; and because the article aims to offer an interpretive, integrated account rather than an exhaustive systematic evaluation.

The documentary search was conducted by combining keywords related to the object of study and its educational context (e.g., interculturality, intercultural competence, intercultural communication, translation, interpreting, and training/education). Sources were identified in academic databases and scholarly search engines, and we also used reference-list searching to trace foundational works that are frequently cited in the field. We included publications in both English and Spanish to reflect the international scope of research on intercultural education and to account for the Latin American contexts discussed in the paper.

To guide the selection process, the review prioritized documents that (a) defined or problematized culture/interculturality; (b) conceptualized intercultural competence in relation to language mediation; or (c) proposed implications for translator and interpreter education (competencies, curricula, learning activities, or assessment). Works were excluded when they addressed interculturality without an educational dimension or without clear relevance to translation/interpreting.

After an initial screening based on titles and abstracts, the retained documents were read in full to confirm their thematic fit and to extract the main conceptual claims and training-oriented contributions.



We conducted an iterative thematic synthesis. First, we identified relevant passages and grouped them into recurring themes that match the article's structure: (1) how culture and interculturality are conceptualized, (2) how language contributes to cultural meaning-making, (3) what intercultural competence involves for translators and interpreters, and (4) training strategies for curricular integration. We then refined these themes by repeatedly comparing sources, which helped us surface common ground, points of tension, and discipline-specific emphases (translation vs. interpreting). The findings are presented as an interpretive narrative that links theory to educational practice.

To make the process as transparent as possible, we kept a record of the search terms used, our inclusion and exclusion decisions, and the thematic categories applied in the synthesis. Even so, as with any narrative review, this approach has limitations, including the possibility of selection bias and the fact that the goal is conceptual integration rather than complete coverage of every available study. Despite these constraints, the method is well suited to clarifying how interculturality is framed in the literature and to developing coherent, practice-oriented recommendations for translator and interpreter education.

The concept of culture and interculturality in translation and interpreting

Culture may be defined as the shared (and historically accumulated) set of values, knowledge, beliefs, customs, and behavioral patterns that guide life in a community (Yahia, 2013). In language education, views of culture have shifted over time: earlier approaches tended to associate culture with artistic production and historical achievements, whereas more recent perspectives foreground social meanings, as well as semantic and pragmatic dimensions of communication (Paricio, 2014).

Under this broader framework, culture can be approached through aesthetic, social, semantic, and pragmatic lenses, which together help explain how cultural meaning is embedded in language use (Pérez & Alonso, 2019).

Because culture operates within multiple layers of social organization, it can be examined at individual, social, and broader collective levels. At the individual level, culture is shaped by personal histories, values, beliefs, and experiences that influence how people interpret reality and relate to others. This view emphasizes that cultural identity is not static; rather, it is continuously constructed through experience and interaction (Byram, 1997).



From a social standpoint, culture refers to the norms, conventions, practices, and shared knowledge that structure behavior within a community. These shared meanings help coordinate interaction, shape expectations about roles and relationships, and influence what counts as appropriate language use. In this sense, culture functions as a collectively learned and transmitted system of meaning that is negotiated through socialization and discourse (Hall, 1976; Kramersch, 1998).

At a broader (often national) level, culture is sometimes described in relation to societies defined by geographic and political boundaries, including institutions, historical narratives, value systems, and widely shared social norms (Giralt, A., 2020). Although national cultures are neither homogeneous nor unchanging, this angle can be useful for identifying recurring patterns that may influence communication across borders (Hofstede, 2001).

For translation and interpreting, conceiving culture as a layered construct is particularly helpful because professionals must simultaneously consider individual viewpoints, social conventions, and broader cultural frameworks. Recognizing these layers supports more informed decisions by helping practitioners anticipate potential misunderstandings and interpret messages not only as linguistic forms but also as culturally situated communicative intentions.

In translation and interpreting, culture is better approached as a dynamic interpretive framework than as a checklist of facts to memorize. Texts are produced within specific sociocultural and historical contexts, and translators may face comprehension problems when cultural references are unfamiliar (Albaladejo, 2011). In such situations, “neutralizing” culturally marked elements can reduce nuance and affect communicative impact. In interpreting, cultural knowledge also shapes discourse comprehension; effective performance depends on sensitivity to contextual cues and on the ability to manage nonverbal communication, which may carry different meanings across cultures (Giralt, A., 2020).

Interculturality, in turn, seeks to encourage dialogue, mutual understanding, and negotiated meaning by recognizing cultural diversity as a legitimate basis for interaction (Wereszczyńska, 2018). For translators and interpreters, this implies approaching cultures as equally valid, communicating with openness and respect, and remaining aware of one’s own cultural assumptions. Because cultural



knowledge varies across contexts and experiences, intercultural work involves continuous learning rather than fixed mastery (Giralt, A., 2020).

The role of language in culture

Historically, translators and interpreters have been essential to communication between societies, especially in trade, diplomacy, and the circulation of knowledge (Guanilo & Cornejo, 2017). From this perspective, culture can be viewed as a symbolic system built from conventional elements that combine to produce abstract and complex meanings, with language representing one of the most developed symbolic resources available (Darias Marrero, 2016).

Language and culture are deeply intertwined: cultural practices, knowledge, and value systems are expressed and reproduced through linguistic choices, so any communicative event carries a cultural dimension (Yahia, 2013). In translation and interpreting, this interdependence becomes especially visible, since contrasts between linguistic systems and cultural frameworks can generate non-equivalence and increase interpretive complexity (Albaladejo, 2011).

Intercultural communication may be understood as a competence that individuals and groups use to interact in social settings (Wereszczyńska, 2018). Because people are shaped by their sociocultural environments, both spoken and written discourse often contains culturally specific references that reflect particular backgrounds (Darias Marrero, 2016). As a result, translators and interpreters need strategies that allow them to convey meaning accurately while minimizing misunderstanding and avoiding distortions of communicative intent (Gregorio, 2012).

Successful communication involves more than linguistic form: it depends on the sociocultural context in which language is produced and interpreted. Pragmatic meaning emerges from context, intention, and social relations; when these dimensions are ignored, communication can fail and stereotypes may be unintentionally reinforced (Yahia, 2013). In this sense, translators and interpreters act as cultural and linguistic mediators who anticipate potential problems and help create understanding across cultural boundaries (Pérez & Alonso, 2019).

Intercultural competence in translation and interpreting

Intercultural education aims to recognize and accept cultural diversity while supporting equitable interaction across cultural groups (Giralt, A., 2020). However, simply acknowledging multiculturalism



is not enough. Intercultural competence entails relating constructively with people from different cultural backgrounds in ways that promote mutual understanding and shared learning. Because learners incorporate cultural elements differently, training should be attentive to personal experiences, needs, and learning processes (Gregorio, 2012).

In translation and interpreting, insufficient intercultural preparation produces challenges that vary with professional demands. Translators typically have more time for documentary research, which enables deeper analysis of cultural references before producing a target text (Giralt, A., 2020). Interpreters, by contrast, depend heavily on prior preparation and must make decisions spontaneously during real-time interaction. In both profiles, intercultural competence remains dynamic and context dependent, because it is shaped by the specific communicative situation (Darias Marrero, 2016).

As a result, translation programs should strengthen documentary research and translation strategies that support accurate interpretation of culturally marked content. Interpreting programs, in turn, should prioritize flexible cultural awareness and rapid comprehension skills so students can mediate effectively in diverse communicative contexts.

Strategies for implementing interculturality in training

Training in translation and interpreting should make it explicit which competencies are required for high-quality professional performance. Practice entails meeting quality standards, responding to client needs, following ethical principles, and working within real constraints of time and context (Gutiérrez, 2016). For this reason, programs benefit from experiential approaches that connect classroom learning with the demands of professional practice.

Intercultural competence develops through sustained interaction and through contact with authentic materials that reflect real language use (González, 2018). Cooperative learning can also strengthen social competence by cultivating leadership, responsibility, and respect for different perspectives (Martínez Lirola, 2018). In translator and interpreter education, working with culturally diverse texts and situations can help students become familiar with unfamiliar realities and transfer this learning to professional contexts.

Experiential opportunities — such as academic mobility and extended cultural immersion — can further strengthen intercultural competence (Gutiérrez, 2016). Likewise, multimedia resources (film,



television, and digital platforms) offer accessible forms of ongoing cultural exposure. Alongside these experiences, training should encourage genuine interest in cultural diversity and promote a respectful, professionally neutral stance that reduces stereotyping and supports effective mediation (Darias Marrero, 2016).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The documentary review indicates that interculturality is not treated as an add-on but as a transversal competence that shapes the quality of translation and interpreting work. To present the findings more clearly, the synthesis below groups recurring points from the reviewed sources and links them to the main themes developed earlier in the article (culture/interculturality, the role of language, professional competence, and training strategies). Overall, intercultural competence is repeatedly associated with:

- A. a broader understanding of culture that avoids reducing cultural difference to national stereotypes;
- B. attention to the contextual and pragmatic conditions under which language produces meaning; and
- C. the need to make meaning-based decisions under professional constraints (time, ethics, and communicative expectations).

First, the literature converges on a layered understanding of culture, consistent with the conceptual discussion presented earlier. Culture is described as dynamic and operating across individual trajectories, social conventions, and broader collective frameworks. For translators and interpreters, this implies that effective mediation requires more than “cultural facts”: it demands the ability to read communicative intentions in context and to anticipate where different cultural frames may lead to divergent interpretations.

Second, the sources reinforce the idea developed in the section on language and culture: meaning is inseparable from context, pragmatics, and sociocultural norms. From this perspective, difficulties in translation and comprehension problems in interpreting frequently arise from culturally marked references, implicit meanings, or differences in interactional expectations. When these cues are overlooked, mediation becomes more vulnerable to distortion, misunderstanding, and the uncritical reproduction of stereotypes.



Third, as discussed in the section on intercultural competence, the way intercultural competence is enacted differs by professional profile. Translation workflows usually allow time for documentary research and revision, which supports deliberate analysis of cultural content; interpreting requires anticipatory preparation and rapid decision-making during real-time processing. Despite these differences, both roles benefit from reflective cultural awareness, professional neutrality, and the capacity to justify decisions that balance fidelity to meaning with communicative effectiveness.

Finally, the reviewed proposals suggest that intercultural competence is still often developed implicitly through language learning, which limits systematic reflection and assessment in translator and interpreter education. This is why the literature emphasized, in the strategies section above, experiential and sustained forms of exposure: authentic materials, cooperative work that strengthens social competence, and mobility or virtual exchange experiences that place learners in guided intercultural interaction. Taken together, these findings support making intercultural objectives, activities, and assessment criteria explicit and aligning them with professional tasks.

In discussion, the findings collectively point to a consistent implication: interculturality should be approached as a core, assessable component of professional preparation rather than as a diffuse by-product of language learning. A layered view of culture and the centrality of pragmatics both reinforce the need to train students to interpret communicative intentions in context and to recognize how meaning shifts across cultural frames. At the same time, the differences between translation and interpreting workflows suggest that programs should operationalize intercultural competence in ways that reflect the actual constraints of each profession.

CONCLUSION

The documentary review and discussion indicate that interculturality should be treated as a central, measurable component of translator and interpreter education. The findings reinforce a layered view of culture: individual, social, and broader collective frames, which means that professional mediation requires interpreting intentions in context rather than relying on static “cultural facts.”

Therefore, intercultural competence must be developed alongside linguistic proficiency, with sustained attention to pragmatics, implicit meanings, and sociocultural norms that shape communication.



Strengthening these dimensions helps future professionals anticipate misunderstandings, avoid stereotyping, and make decisions that preserve meaning and communicative purpose across languages. In addition, the way this competence is operationalized should reflect professional constraints. Translation training can emphasize documentary research and revision as tools to address culturally marked content, whereas interpreting training should prioritize preparation strategies and rapid, context-sensitive decision-making during live interaction. Aligning learning activities and evaluation criteria with these distinct demands can make intercultural development more systematic and observable. Finally, intercultural education benefits from explicit curricular integration and from opportunities for guided international interaction (including mobility and virtual exchange). Making intercultural objectives visible across the program supports not only technical accuracy but also ethical, effective mediation. In a globalized and culturally diverse environment, these competencies help translators and interpreters facilitate understanding and reduce communicative friction across communities.

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