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# Navigating Theory and Practice in Intercultural Language Teaching: Challenges Faced by a Pre-service Language Teacher in Enacting an Interpretive Perspective in Classroom Interaction

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the author's classroom practice of implementing an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching and learning in two online intercultural workshops on the topic of face masks designed and delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic. It reflexively examines two critical incidents in classroom practice in terms of what these incidents reveal about the challenges faced by pre-service teachers in operationalizing an interpretive stance towards intercultural language teaching and learning in practice. Based on the epistemology of reflective practice, this self-study seeks to produce knowledge-of-practice by framing the author's practical knowledge as language teacher in relation to theories of intercultural language teaching. Classroom discourse analysis of teaching and learning sequencies provides an emic lens on the enactment of an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching at the micro level in terms of two basic aspects of pedagogical practice: 1) Embedding interpretation in learning design and 2) Mediating learners' interpretations in classroom interaction. The findings reveal that this author's attempts to personalise intercultural language learning and elicit meaningful reflections from students were constrained by the limited semiotic richness of the material presented and the difficulty of going beyond a superficial interactional format to provide effective scaffolding and successfully realize a dialogic stance towards knowledge building. The paper considers the implications of these challenges for pre-service teacher education and offers suggestions for supporting teachers hoping to teach interculturally.

**Keywords:** interpretive, intercultural language teaching and learning, self-study, knowledge building, pre-service teachers

## Introduction

Within the context of higher education, there is increased recognition of the need to incorporate opportunities for intercultural learning into classroom practice in order to enhance learners' capacities

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***Data Availability Statement:*** *All relevant data are in this paper.*

for engaging with cultural difference (e.g., McConachy et al., 2022). In the field of language education, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) have argued for an interpretive view of learning that emphasises the close relationship between language and culture and the importance of learners (and teachers) developing the capacities for interpreting meanings across cultural boundaries. This foregrounds the teachers' role as someone who can effectively engage learners in such interpretive processes and help them mediate between different cultural standpoints (Kohler, 2015). However, for language teachers that are new to teaching, or have had limited exposure to intercultural perspectives, it can be difficult to know how to operationalise learning goals at the level of classroom practice and to effectively use classroom interaction to promote interpretive engagement (Díaz, 2013). Several studies have empirically examined the enactment of intercultural language teaching and provided insight into how teachers manage classroom interactions to promote learning (e.g., Kearney, 2015; McConachy, 2018). Nevertheless, few studies have tapped into the difficulty of managing classroom interaction for teachers who are new to intercultural language teaching and learning or new to teaching altogether.

In this paper, I report on a self-study inquiring into my own classroom practice of intercultural language teaching as a former MA TESOL student in the UK. I use classroom discourse analysis to examine teaching and learning sequences relating to two critical incidents where I faced challenges operationalizing an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching and learning. Given the lack of studies on how pre-service language teachers make sense of intercultural language teaching at the level of classroom practice, this study aims to contribute towards modelling a way to navigate between practice and theory for pre-service language teachers who are interested in implementing an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching.

### Enacting an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching and learning

This study aligns with work in the field of intercultural language learning that emphasizes the culturally embedded nature of linguistic meaning-making and the fundamentally interpretive nature of learning (Kearney, 2015; Kohler, 2020; Kramsch, 2014; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Risager, 2007). Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that learning is not a process of memorizing vocabulary and grammar or internalising static rules for behavior, but is rather a hermeneutic process of coming to understand the nature of meaning-making through engagement with different languages and cultures and active reflection on one's own positioning as a participant in diversity. Within an interpretive perspective, learning involves understanding the ways that linguistic forms and practices reflect assumptions about reality and notions of "appropriate" interpersonal behavior. This means that a symbolically mediated "experience of difference" is central to the learning process (Kramsch, 2011).

As Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) point out, when learning about language and culture, learners do not unproblematically acquire the knowledge like "empty vessels" but interpret meanings and construct understandings by drawing on the fore-understandings that they developed in their previous life experience and their socialization into established linguistic and cultural systems (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and discourse communities (Kramsch, 1998). These fore-understandings form an "interpretive architecture," including a complex combination of cognitive resources such as cultural knowledge, values, beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, scripts, schemas, stereotypes, and representations (McConachy, 2018). They are constructed in symbols especially in linguistic forms and constitute a meaning-making repertoire (Kramsch, 2014).

Viewed positively, learners' existing cognitive resources and interpretive habits can guide the interpretation of new linguistic experiences in meaningful ways. However, if this occurs in a largely unconscious manner, there is also the risk that learners will misinterpret target language meanings or misjudge other's intentions, potentially making negative judgments about others based on ethnocentric interpretations of unfamiliar linguistic and cultural phenomena that they encounter. Therefore, it has been suggested that the teacher needs to play an active role in scaffolding classroom interaction in order to help learners engage effectively in processes of interpretation and reflection and view cultural phenomena from multiple perspectives (e.g., Díaz, 2013, Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Kohler, 2015).

Based on the existing literature, this paper takes the position that operationalising an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching and learning minimally entails two fundamental aspects of pedagogical practice for the classroom teacher: 1) embedding opportunities for interpretation in learning design and 2) mediating learners' interpretations in classroom interaction.

*Embedding interpretation in learning design*

Given the theoretical position that learning is driven by interpretation, opportunities for learners to interpret language and culture need to be purposefully incorporate into lesson design. This entails the strategic inclusion of activities and questions that allow learners to construct interpretations of new cultural phenomena, explore perceived differences, and reflect on their individual reactions to intercultural experiences inside and outside the classroom (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Behind such design is a pedagogical stance that emphasizes persons, personalization, and personal experiences (Kohler, 2020). This stance acknowledges that learners do not automatically absorb what they are "taught" but primarily retain what they find significant and meaningful (Kohler, 2020). It also acknowledges that in any meaningful learning that has a lasting bearing on learners' development, learners construct personal experiential meaning of the phenomena they encounter based on their existing models of the world, and thereby integrate new experience into their existing cognitive frameworks (Wells, 1999). This is more likely to occur when teachers use questions and tasks which elicit learners' cognitive and affective reactions to new cultural input or experiences, such as asking them to verbalize their expectations, judgements, discomfort and surprise (Díaz, 2013; Hoff, 2016, 2019; Kohler, 2020; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; McConachy, 2018).

*Mediating learners' interpretations in classroom interaction*

The second fundamental aspect of pedagogical practice involved in enacting an interpretive perspective is mediating learners' interpretations that arise within the flow of classroom discourse to promote reflection and scaffold deeper learning (Kohler, 2015). It is when learners start to articulate their understandings and enter into a dialogic frame that the teacher becomes more clearly positioned as an intercultural mediator who can help learners go beyond their initial self-referential interpretations in order to more critically reflect on their tacit assumptions, and engage with alternative perspectives (Liddicoat, 2020). It is worth noting that self-referentiality does not necessarily make a learner's interpretation a false one, but rather it is the sole reference to one's own cultural perspective that can be problematic. The purpose of mediation, therefore, is not to lead students to a pre-defined correct answer or reach a consensus on interpretation, but to prompt students to decentre from their existing perspectives, move them to greater sophistication of interpretation and thinking (Liddicoat, 2022).

Liddicoat (2019, 2022) emphasizes that mediation is a discursive activity in that it involves "languaging"—using and talking about language to shape thinking, formulate understanding and build knowledge (Swain, 2009). Language is not a neutral tool for conveying interpretations of language and culture but is rather a constituent element of interpretations themselves. The concepts, phrases, and logical constructions used by learners represent the interpretive architecture that guides their interpretation of aspects of culture. Therefore, intercultural mediation involves the teacher's purposeful attempts to elicit more elaborate interpretations while promoting reflection on underlying assumptions and aspects of language that constitute, shape, and mediate human thought (Kohler, 2015). Languaging facilitates the externalisation of assumptions, making them available for scrutiny.

Within such a process, the teacher is also simultaneously modelling ways of using language to think interculturally, such as using metalanguage, asking probing questions, presenting alternative perspectives, reformulating interpretations to make them more elaborate, and revealing assumptions (e.g., Kearney, 2015; McConachy, 2018). These modelling practices not only serve the function of promoting interpretation and reflection in the moment but are also part of what is mediated in the sense that learners have the opportunity to potentially internalise concepts, terms, questioning strategies, and other semiotic resources that enable richer intercultural thinking and learning (Kohler, 2020).

*Navigating theory and practice in implementing an interpretive perspective*

As outlined above, classroom pedagogy guided by an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching places great emphasis on the personal and the subjective aspect of learning, and on the process of thinking and learning. For the language teacher, actualising such an emphasis entails tailoring instruction to particularities of learners' life worlds, instead of following a set of pre-defined teaching method or techniques. In this sense, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that intercultural language teaching is best understood as a pedagogical stance towards language, culture, learning, and interculturality rather than a method. Such a postmethod view (Kumaravadivelu, 2005) provides significant scope for language teachers to develop a personalised approach to enacting intercultural language teaching and developing as a practitioner (Kohler, 2020), inquiring into and adjusting their practices as they accumulate experience. This resonates with sociocultural perspectives in language teacher education that see teacher professional learning as a personalized endeavour whereby teachers engage in reflective practice to evaluate and appropriate academic knowledge in connection with experience (Johnson et al., 2022).

While the flexibility enabled by a postmethod conceptualization of intercultural language teaching is valuable, studies have suggested that its fluidity may also create significant uncertainty and pose challenges to language teachers who are unaccustomed to intercultural language teaching, as well as for pre-service teachers, who have highly limited practical knowledge of teaching (Díaz, 2013; Siregar, 2016). Moreover, although the existing literature does provide some theoretical or practical guidance (Kohler, 2020; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; McConachy, 2009; Álvarez Valencia & Michelson, 2022) and empirically theorized examples of researchers and experienced teachers' good practices (Hoff, 2019; Kearney, 2015; McConachy, 2018; Quist, 2013; Svarstad, 2021), it can be highly challenging for less experienced teachers to operationalise theories and realize the vision envisaged by good examples.

In order to support pre-service language teachers' professional development, it is important to identify and understand possible challenges that they may face in their initial attempts at implementing an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching and learning. Thus, this paper will analyse how one pre-service language teacher dealt with students' intercultural language learning in classroom interaction.

## Methodology

### Overview of the study

This study aims to understand what kind of challenges pre-service teachers might face when aiming to operationalize an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching and learning (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). To achieve this, I adopt the methodology of self-study to examine two critical incidents that presented challenges to me when I was a pre-service teacher. This self-study concerns my own classroom practice in delivering intercultural workshops while enrolled in an MA TESOL program at a university in the UK in 2019/2020. In this study, I aim to look back on and critically examine the nature of these critical incidents. The research question guiding the study is:
Q) What do the critical incidents reveal about the nature of the challenges that the pre-service language teacher faced in operationalizing an interpretive stance towards intercultural language teaching and learning in practice?

### Background

As a pre-service teacher three years ago, my experience echoed existing studies and informal comments from teachers regarding the challenges associated with implementing intercultural language teaching in the classroom, specifically moving from theoretical knowledge to pedagogical practice. Prior to my actual teaching, I had taken several Master's modules that provided insights into the theory and practice of language teaching methodology, as well as a number of other modules that helped with my knowledge of the features of spoken interaction and written discourse, as well as sociolinguistic aspects of English language use. However, I had not fully assimilated understanding

of the nature of discourse or become skilful at analysing language use. In fact, those analytic techniques and theories, by and large, remained an external body of formal knowledge and skills to me. And although I had acquired some understanding of lesson planning and implementation, a lack of experience meant that it was difficult to really know how to put them into practice. I had also taken a specialist module on intercultural language teaching and learning. This module introduced principles for intercultural language teaching and learning (i.e., active construction, make connections, reflection, social interaction, responsibility) and processes in intercultural language learning (i.e., noticing, comparing, reflecting, interacting) conceptualized by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013). It also involved pedagogical knowledge about how to design learning interactions, experiences and how to use teachers' and learners' experiences as resource.

Despite all this preparation, I found actual classroom practice to be more beyond my control than expected. During the class, I stumbled from time to time, because of not knowing how to respond to students, and I felt confused very often about what was going on. It was a very frustrating and painful experience. Over the last three years, I have been constantly referring back to that teaching experience to make sense of the theories of intercultural language education, which in turn has helped me critically reflect on my teaching practice. I came to understand the complexity in my classroom practice and recognize the messiness as a fundamental part of intercultural language teaching. This has empowered me to see my previous frustration with a more empathetic eye and with a more constructive attitude. Meanwhile, I have come to realize the significance of helping novice practitioners understand that inevitable complexity and messiness of classroom teaching, because otherwise the negative emotional reactions that are likely to emerge at the beginning of one's experiment in intercultural language teaching may threaten one's sense of self as a teacher. It may demotivate teachers from committing to intercultural language education.

Therefore, I decided to make use of two critical incidents in my own teaching to develop an in-depth understanding of the difficulties that novices may experience.

### Self-study as methodology

This study adopts self-study as a methodology to understand the challenges of operationalizing an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching from an insider perspective. Self-study methodology enables a unique insider's perspective on not just what the teacher finds challenging but what challenges among others a teacher has found the most significant in their professional development in a longer term and why the challenges may be the case (Loughran, 2005). This is something difficult to capture by more traditional methods such as questionnaires and interviews since pre-service teachers would not be able to report what is unknown to them or explain what they do not understand yet due to their limited understanding of what it means to adopt an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching in practice. In addition, self-study offers a way to generate "knowledge of practice" (Loughran, 1996), bridging theory and practice, and resolving the tension between the authority of outsider academic experts and the voices of insider practitioners. Based on an epistemology of reflective practice (Schön, 1983), self-study treats practitioners' own voices as central in the creation of teaching-related knowledge and contends that the genesis of professional knowledge development should be regarded as inherent in practitioners' experience (Craig & Curtis, 2020). As a form of teacher inquiry, self-study seeks to verify the professional knowledge that teachers develop through their own experiences and connect it with theory (Martin & Russell, 2020).

In this study, I seek to validate my practical knowledge of challenges related to enacting an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching by presenting my reflection on practice in the academic form of in-depth discourse analysis in relation to Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) theoretical framework of intercultural language teaching and learning. While the findings of this self-study may not be generalized to other pre-service teachers or contexts, it offers "analytical generalizability" (Duff, 2006), through the productive interaction between academic theorizing and personal practical knowledge (Freese, 2006).

### Research context and workshop design

To gain some first-hand classroom experience of intercultural language teaching, I designed and delivered two intercultural workshops, each lasting 2 hours. The workshops took place online via ZOOM in summer 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. The workshop topic was face masks. The choice of this topic was based on my observation during the early pandemic period that wearing face masks appeared to be an extremely controversial issue. I felt deeply disturbed by ethnocentric judgements of not/wearing face masks on both Chinese and "Western" social media and considered that it would be timely to give intercultural workshops revolving around issues relating to wearing face masks.

The overall aim of the workshops was for students to understand a diversity of cultural meanings of wearing face masks, decentre from one's own cultural perspectives on not/wearing face masks during the pandemic, and deconstruct the China-versus-West ideological discourse on wearing face masks. The main workshop activities were class discussion based on a range of texts on face masks with a list of prompt questions for discussion. The first workshop focused on exploring a range of alternative cultural meanings of face masks and reflecting on one's existing cultural knowledge. The second one was targeted at the complexity of cultural issues related to face masks, involving exploration of the changing nature of cultural perceptions concerning face masks, the diverse cultural reactions towards face masks within America, and the problems of East versus West ideology regarding face mask "culture."

### Student participants

Three volunteer student participants were recruited in this study. They were all adult Chinese speakers (labelled as S1, S2, S3) with a bachelor's degree from Chinese universities. They all had over ten years' experience in learning English and identified themselves as B2 English speakers. None of them had received interculturally focused training.

S1: A 23-year-old female company employee in China. She spoke intermediate Japanese and English. She had travel experience in many European countries and long-term and close contact with people from different countries.

S2: A 23-year-old female postgraduate student at a university in Japan. She spoke intermediate Japanese and English. She had been on several student exchanges in the UK and Japan during her middle school and undergraduate study.

S3: A 25-year-old female company employee in China. She had received an offer of admission to a postgraduate program in the UK and would go to further her study soon after the intercultural workshops.

### Data collection and analysis

The two workshops were video recorded in their entirety to allow comprehensive recall of the classroom dynamics and make classroom interactional sequences available for close analysis. Lesson plans and teaching materials also constituted supplementary data. Ethical permission had been gained to video-record and transcribe the classroom interaction from the relevant ethical committee within the university.

All of the classroom interactional data was transcribed, and classroom discourse analysis was conducted (Walsh, 2013). While not adhering to a single discourse analytic convention, the procedure was guided by the principle that utterances derive their meanings from their sequential context where they are made relevant by the talk that precede them and are then interpreted by the subsequent speaker (Seedhouse, 2004). Rather than interpreted in isolation at the semantic level, each utterance was analysed as a co-construction of meaning within interactional sequences. This is crucial to understanding how the implementation of an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching is contingent on the interactive contributions of different participants. Special attention was paid

to how the teacher elicits and deals with student voices, interpretations and reflections and how the students orient to the teacher's questions and responses. Specifically, in relation to an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching and learning, I examined what is being said within each turn to identify what moves the classroom participants try to accomplish. Meanwhile, I adopted the "next turn proof procedure" (Seedhouse, 2004) and analysed the interaction across utterances to understand the perlocutionary effects of each utterance on the next speaker. This allowed me to ascertain what learning outcomes resulted from the teacher's questions, whether there were any mismatches between teacher intention and student response, whether and how the teacher provided scaffolding in response to student contributions.

Some sound features of speech were also transcribed and analysed including sound stress, cut-off, latching, overlapping talk, pauses, lengthened sounds. These features are important for understanding the dynamics and problems in classroom conversation. They serve as indicators of problems in speaking and conversational problems, which can be manifestation of the challenges of operationalizing intercultural language teaching at the level of classroom conversation. For example, a combination of multiple cut-offs, pauses, and lengthened fillers in the teacher's utterance can indicate that the teacher is encountering challenges in formulating questions or responding to students. Long pauses might suggest difficulty in comprehending or answering the teacher's questions, whereas overlapping talk from student can be a valuable clue to students' perceptions of the teacher's questions (e.g., perceiving a question as clear, eager to answer).

**Table 1** *Transcription conventions*

| | |
|---|---|
| word | sound stress |
| wor- | a sound is cut off abruptly |
| =word | latching – no discernible space between two turns at talk |
| [word | start of simultaneous talk |
| word] | end of simultaneous talk |
| (.) | very short pause |
| (1s) (2.5s) etc. | timed pause in seconds |
| Emmm aaaah etc. | lengthened sounds |

### The data

Below, I present an analysis of two critical incidents that surfaced in the data. Whilst "critical incident" often refers to "surprising" or "unexpected" episodes (Schön, 1983), the two episodes examined in this study are troublesome situations in which the phenomenon (i.e. teaching and learning) eludes the original direction intended (Karimi & Nazari, 2021). Many authors argue that what makes an event critical is the meaning that one makes of it and the significance that one attaches to it (e.g., Angelides, 2001; Richards & Farrell, 2005).

The two classroom episodes are selected because they have played a significant role in enhancing my own understanding and practical knowledge, as a novice practitioner, of challenges related to the enactment of an intercultural perspective in the classroom. The incidents relate to what I have argued could be seen as fundamental aspects of pedagogical practice when operationalising an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching; namely, creating opportunities for interpretation and mediating students' interpretations. These critical incidents have subsequently driven my own engagement with intercultural theories and informed my current practice of mentoring pre-service language teachers' professional learning of intercultural language teaching as part of my doctoral research.

In order to maintain a critical distance between me as the researcher, the inquirer, in this article and me as the teacher, the practitioner, and in order to mitigate the influence of unwarranted bias on the rigor of my analysis, I adopt the third pronoun "she" and "the teacher" in the analysis section to talk about the practitioner – me – whose practice is subject to inquiry.

*Critical Incident 1: Creating opportunities for interpretation in learning design*

Extract 1 demonstrates a segment of interaction between the teacher and S2 under an activity framed as "exploring alternative cultural meaning of wearing face mask." As documented in the lesson plan, this "alternative meaning" is "in English cultural contexts, the image of face masks is often associated with professions like doctor and construction workers," and interpretation questions were included, such as "What do you notice in terms of the names of face masks?" "What assumptions about wearing masks do the pictures suggest?" "What do you think of their assumptions? Why?" In the extract, while displaying the picture below (see Figure 1), the teacher asks questions to elicit student interpretations and facilitate intercultural language learning practices of "noticing," "comparing," and "reflecting" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

**Figure 1** *Sample picture used for activity*

**Extract 1**

01 T: Anything (.) that you feel surprising?
02 S2: Why the (.) er N95 is respirator? [And warn]
03 T: [Yeah very] good point. Like there are two words (.) for it, so the one we often see, is surgical mask, and the other one is (.) respirator, what do you feel (.) about this- just this word, like respirator and mask. Just any kind of feeling like?
04 S2: I think emm the mask is for daily use, and respirator is something in surgery.
05 T: Yeah! Exactly. Eh like as you said, respirator sounds very professional, and what do you think this kind of words, like what kind of influence can can words have (.) on our opinions? What kind of influence can it have, on our opinions? on our feelings to mask?
06 S2: Maybe the surgical mask, emm people can can easily buy it or get it, but the respirator is only for the (.) er pro- professional staffs or some people like that, so if you are not in some emergency (.) situation, you you you don't need the respirator.
07 T: Yeah, so what kind of image (.) do WE have? for the like these two kinds of mask? (1s) Like are they professional or they are just normal masks?
08 S2: B- but you know in China we
09 T: Yeah
10 S2: we we can buy these two (.) kinds of masks, er from Taobao or something like that, so so may-maybe we don't think respirator is hard to get, or, is for the profession professional s staff or people.

The teacher starts the exchange with encouraging students to notice features of new language input and then engages them in an interpretive process by asking about their personal feelings about the lexical items. She continues with reflective questions, asking students to analyse the effect of language on their own perceptions of face masks and articulate the group perceptions of face masks in their home culture. Moving from interpretive questions about a text produced by others (i.e., the picture) to reflective questions targeted at students' own cultural perceptions regarding face masks, the teacher treats the intercultural language learning as experience of a new culture through a text that learners will interpret based on their own cultural assumptions.

While the interpretive questions are targeted at students' personal meanings, what they elicit is mainly generic answers instead of students' personalized thoughts. In the questions in line 1 and 3,

the teacher adopts the pronoun "you" as the subject of the questions and asks about students' personal feelings, within an attempt to engage students as individuals and make them speak as themselves. Especially, in line 3, the teacher tries to elicit students' affective reactions towards the new language input by directly asking about their personal feelings about "these words," namely "surgical mask" and "respirator." Although S2 provides her interpretation and marks it with "I think" in line 4, her response does not disclose much of her own cultural assumptions. As revealed later in line 10 where S2 explicitly talks about her own cultural view of face masks, her view of "respirator" as something not merely for "professional staff or people" conflicts with the account "respirator is something in surgery." Thus, S2's interpretation in line 4 is merely her guess of the implicit meaning of those English words without linking to her own interpretive framework. However, to create deep learning, it is crucial to activate and build on students' existing model of the world and create the subjective experience of using one's exiting cultural frameworks to make sense of new cultural encounters.

In the sequence from line 1 to 4, the teacher tries to create intercultural experience through a subjective lens and positions students as active participants and interpreters of that experience. However, the questions only create an experience of target language and culture at a superficial level, as they could not tap into students' own language and cultural situatedness and bringing in their fore-understandings. While the questions the teacher uses may have some potential to create a meaningful intercultural experience, the material she uses as a prompt to engage students in the questions makes it very difficult to realize that potential. The picture (figure 1) lacks semiotic richness, as it only displays isolated pieces of linguistic and visual information. The sign, or say, the relationship between the signifiers (i.e., lexical items and images of surgical masks and N95 respirator) and the signified (the meaning of face masks) remains at a referential level. It shows little cultural ideas such as how face masks may be perceived or used similarly or differently in other cultural contexts. Those linguistic and visual symbols of face masks do not in themselves reflect any perceptions or practices related to buying or wearing face masks. In turn, the material provides very limited affordances for meaning making. To put it simply, there is little that learners can do with the picture and few unfamiliar meanings they can discover in it. Engaging with such a material does not allow students to "live through" the experience of alternative cultural aspects such as values, beliefs, practices related to face masks that the teacher might want students to study. Without experience of concrete cultural elements, it is hard for learners to participate in meaning-making activities as intended by those teacher questions, for experience constitutes the source of the personal meanings that learners could make of the new cultural phenomena (Wells, 1999).

The lack of meaningful experience and profound engagement in meaning-making has a consequence for the reflective dialogue between the teacher and S2 in lines 5-10 where reflection appears in general and abstract terms. In line 5 by "what kind of influence can words have on our opinions… on our feelings to mask," the teacher invites students to reflectively observe their experience of another language and reason about the relationship between language and their (cultural) perceptions of face masks. However, instead of reflecting particularly on her own cultural positioning, S2 frames her response as a generic statement, using "people" and the generic pronoun "you" as the subjects of sentences rather than the personal pronoun suggested by the teacher. It is not clear which cultural context, the home cultural context or that of the other, the student is talking about. Nonetheless, the teacher interprets S2's answer as one about the "foreign" cultural context rather than the student's own culture, as evidenced in her attempt to change the focus back to the students' home culture in line 7. To redirect the student, the teacher reduces the cognitive demand in her question. Whereas the previous question asked students to "analyse" their own culture, the question in line 7 only requires them to "remember" and "recall" (Bloom et al., 1956). Here, the teacher directly elicits the cultural image that students have about face masks, treating students' personal cultural knowledge as "offline representations" that one "possesses" and "stores" in memory and that can be recalled anytime in the same manner (Wells, 1999).

Meanwhile, the teacher gives special sound stress on the pronoun "we." However, this can be problematic. By emphasizing "we," the teacher treats classroom participants as a single homogeneous group whose members share the same cultural knowledge and invokes a sense of us-versus-them (e.g., Ladegaard, 2020). Such a collective stance and dichotomous thinking about groups is then taken up by S2. The student frames her reflection within a national contrastive paradigm by "but in

China we." Not seeing such a framing as problematic, the teacher immediately provides an affirmative response token "yeah" in line 9 latching onto S2's unfinished utterance. On the one hand, this "yeah" can be seen as an affirmation of the student getting back on track to talking about her own culture. On the other, it encourages the student to continue taking a national contrastive perspective on culture. Consequently, in line 10 S2 continues with some factual information she has about the availability of face masks in the market in China and infers from that the collective perception of face masks she thinks is shared by people in China. As such, the teacher and S2 co-construct an essentialized and stereotypical representation of self as the representative of China who does not see face masks as something only for professional people and people in emergency in contrast to English-speaking cultural others who hold the opposite view.

In lines 5–10, while the teacher attempts to build on previous interpretive processes and foster students' reflection on their own cultural situatedness, the questions only result in superficial reflection and even perpetuation of stereotypes of self and other. The question in line 5, targeted at the abstract conceptualization of the relationship between language, "words," and culture, "our opinions," "our feelings," can be a valid and meaningful question. However, because the material lacks concrete point of connection between the symbolic forms (i.e., vocabulary and images of face masks) and potential social meaning that face masks can have in a particular cultural context for students to explore in the first place, students do not have the resources that they need in order to analyse the relationship, which makes it difficult to realize the learning potential of that question as the teacher intends. Arguably, "words" in the picture as some decontextualised linguistic codes do not influence people's perceptions. Also, because students did not have meaningful experience of another culture and their fore-understandings were not activated in the initial interpretive processes, there is a lack of ground for reflection and lack of a source for abstract conceptualization (Kolb, 2014). As a result, the teacher's question appears de-contextualized and ambiguous. It is unclear what "our opinion" and "our feelings" the teacher refers to and whether she is asking about collective meanings or students' personal meanings. For input-driven reflection (McConachy, 2018) to be meaningful, first of all, it is important to trigger and effectively tap into learners' existing knowledge and assumptions.

As to the question in line 7, direct elicitation of students' personal knowledge of culture can have some learning potential, even though it may lead to the emergence of generalization and stereotypes. As McConachy (2018) shows, reflective questions about learners' generic experiences beyond particular instances can be useful for making students notice their stereotypes, that is, the generalized images one has about their perceived social reality, norms, and roles (Hinton, 2015). It may be better to expose rather than ignore the influence of stereotypes (Houghton, 2012; McConachy, 2018). However, even for this type of reflection, it is still possible and necessary to involve some degree of specificity by contextualizing reflection in relatively concrete life scenarios that allow for noticing and elaborating on more contextual specifics such as group features of people who wear masks, regional and individual variability in perceptions and practices of wearing masks, different pandemic circumstances. Such details about the contexts offer scaffolds for further critical examination of the constructed nature of the stereotypes, the changing nature of reality, and the generalizability of perceived norms, for instance. In contrast, the highly decontextualized question in line 7 treats students' cultural knowledge of face masks as static and fixed, independent of concrete situations. It treats one's meaning-making resources related to face masks as isolated from other aspects of one's "interpretive architecture" (McConachy, 2018). However, personal knowledge is never context-free or used in isolation; instead, it is embedded in the concrete act of knowing, activated in a particular situational context, and constructed by the knower as a version of the meaning resource to respond to an immediate situation (Wells, 1999). Thus, for reflection to be meaningful, it is significant for the questions to tap into the relationship between one's cultural knowledge and the contexts in which this knowledge is created, shaped, and used.

*Critical Incident 2: Mediating learners' critical reflection on a prior interpretation in classroom interaction*

Extract 2 shows one example of the teacher mediating students' reflection. The following interaction took place in a reflective activity under the frame of "reflect on one's cultural schema" in the second workshop. The aim of this activity was written in the lesson plan as "Reflect on the assumption from

the last class: "Protecting oneself is human nature so people tend to bulk-buy masks.'" This "assumption" was a statement made by a student in the first workshop. In the extract, the teacher attempts to prompt students to reformulate the statement and reflect on their cultural assumptions on what "protecting oneself" means.

**Extract 2**

01 T: So another thing I wanna bring up, also what we talked about in last class. So um like you mentioned a kind of view that protecting yourself, protecting yourself is kind of human nature, and so people that's why people will bulk buy 爆买 mask, so do you after our discussion today, do you have new understandings or new interpretations or anything like you just think about (.) from our discussion?

(11s)

02 T: 就是我们上节课, 我们上节课不是提到说, 就是啊我们为了保护自己所以比如说像中国人会爆买口罩. 那现在就是对这个- 这个肯定是一方面, 那对这个解读怎么让它更加的完善？就是这种想法, 这种说法, 怎么让它更完善, 就是在看到了比如说 America 他们对口罩的这种理解也好 assumption 也好.

03 S1: 我不是特别理解这个问题, 什么叫更完善.

04 T: 就是, 就是我们上节课说啊大家为了保护自己 protecting yourself is kind of human nature so people will buy mask. 但是我们看到像美国就是它就是这个东西好像并不是完全适用于美国的状况, 你觉得可能是因为这个 interpretation 哪个地方可能会有一点问题, 怎么改一下就可以去解释通这个事情. 我觉得 absolutely protecting yourself is human nature that I 我也是这么认为的, 那怎么让这个, 怎么来解释 American people some people [don't-

05 S3: [哦他们本质上就是对口罩有 different opinions, because Chinese people think it's very important, but er it's necessary, but err in America 他们就会觉得这个东西是不必要的呀, 然后甚至是有抵触情绪的, 对于他们来说, 所以本质上他们就不会去抢啊, 跟物资, 其实就是跟物资资源的丰富丰富程度没有特大关系吧, 这一点上.

06 T: Emhm, 那你觉得是, 就是 Emm 让我想一下我要说什么. 那你怎么去来呃就是重新 rephrase (.)就是之前的那个 interpretation,就是怎么改改, 就是换一种说法让它 make sense, 更加 make sense.

07 S2: 就是对于美国人为什么会对口罩有一种抵触情绪这个 interpretation 怎么 rephrase 是吗？

08 T: 昂昂就是说, 就是就是之前我们就是有一种观点是说因为大家保护自己是 human nature 所以大家会爆买口罩这这这个观点怎么去 rephrase 一下.

09 S2: 啊那肯定是就是咱们受到咱们有这种想法是咱们受到咱们周围的一些的 media 言论的一些影响, 具体是哪种言论, 就是就是要举些实例吗还是说？

10 T: Emmm (2.5s)就是你觉得就是这句话可能, 是有它合理的地方, 但也有他不合理的地方, 你觉得不合理的地方可能是在哪儿？

11 S3: 就是人要去, 就是你说人性是自私的, 他要去抢这个东西首先他要认为这个东西是有意义的他才会去抢, 就是对他有意-但是关键就是这个美国人, 就是所谓的外国的很多就是人民他们不觉得是有意义的是必须抢的, 应该留给一线的工作人员, 所以如果他们觉得他们觉得这个口罩很重要的话, 他们也会去抢, 因为人性都是利己主- 就是某些时候危急情况下都是利己的. 都是[为了自己.

12 T: [那你觉得比如说, 是不是说, 在 protecting , 我们对什么叫做 protect myself 的这种观念是不一样的=

13 S3: =不一样的, [是的.

14 T: [所以, 所以才, 才是-这句话之所以不适用于美国的情况是因为我们对 protect oneself 是不一样, 所以说 protect ourselves is human nature but it does [not necessarily] lead to buying mask.

15 S2: [啊↑]

16 S2: 我我我刚才想到的是，刚才哭的那个人说 wearing mask will will prevent her to communicate with the important people in her life. 就她觉得 wearing mask 她觉得 protecting oneself in this very 就在这个非常时期是需要 communicate with others,但是咱们觉得 protect ourselves 是可以把自己关起-就是一个人也可以, 我们微信视频就是网络就是已经就是 enough to communicate with others but the how to really protect ourselves is to stay in home by yourself 就是全副武装自己, 就是 physically 和外界隔离了, 但是感觉 westerner protect ourselves 是有那种, 我既得 physically comfortable 又得 emotionally comfortable 的情况下我再 protect, 就是这种感觉.

17 T: Good good so okay 我觉得刚才的那个解读非常的 make sense.

Translation:

01 T: So another thing I wanna bring up, also what we talked about in last class. So um like you mentioned a kind of view that protecting yourself, protecting yourself is kind of human nature, and so people that's why people will bulk buy 'BAO MAI' mask, so do you, after our discussion today, do you have new understandings or new interpretations or anything like you just think about (.) from our discussion?

(11s)

02 T: It's like in our last lesson, in our last lesson we mentioned that like uh in order to protect ourselves, we like Chinese people will bulk-buy masks. So now like about this- this of course is one aspect, so about this interpretation, how can you make it more complete? Like this view, this phrasing, how can you make it more complete, like after seeing Americans' perception of face mask or say assumptions.

03 S1: I don't really understand the question. What do you mean by more complete?

04 T: It's like like in the last class, we said uh in order to protect oneself, people- protecting yourself is kind of human nature so people will buy masks. But we can see like America like it seems that this does not really apply to the American context. In your opinion, this is maybe because which part of this interpretation may have some problems? How can you refine it to make sense of this? I think absolutely protecting yourself is human nature, that I I also think so, so how can you make it? How can you explain American people some people [don't-

05 S3: [Oh they essentially have different opinions on masks, because Chinese people think it's important, but er it's necessarily- but in America they think this is not necessary, and even feel resistant to it, so for them, so essentially they won't panic buy it, the supplies, there's nothing to do with the availability of supplies and storages, this point.

06 T: Emhm so you think it's so emmm so let me think what I want to say. Then how can you er like rephrase (.) like the previous interpretation, like how to refine refine, like change the phrasing to make it make sense, make more sense.

07 S2: So about why American people feel resistant to face masks this interpretation how can we rephrase?

08 T: Um um it's like, so so previously we like talked about the view that because protecting ourselves is human nature people tend to bulk-buy masks, this this this idea, how can you rephrase it a bit.

09 S2: Uh so of course we are- we have this view because we are influenced by some media discourse around us, specially what kind of discourse, do you also want some concrete examples or?

10 T: Emmm (2.5s) it's like in your view, like this sentence maybe have plausible parts, but it also has implausible parts. In your views, which part is implausible?

11 S3: It's like people go- like if you say human nature is selfish, they go to panic buy it. First of all, they have to consider it significant, then they would panic buy. Like it is significant for him- but the point is that Americans, like these so-called many foreign people, they don't find it important to, necessary to buy, should save it for frontline doctors, so if they think the mask is important, they will also panic buy it, because human nature is egoi- under some emergent circumstances, people are egoistic. [Prioritize oneself.

12 T: [So do you think for example, is it like, in terms of protecting, we have different perceptions of what can be seen as protecting myself =
13 S3: =Different, [yes.
14 T: [So so it is exactly- the reason why the view does not apply to America is actually because in terms of protect oneself, we are different. That's why- it's like protect ourselves is human nature but it does [not necessarily] lead to buying mask.
15 S2: [Aaah ]
16 S2: I I I was just thinking that, just now that crying woman says wearing mask will will prevent her to communicate with the important people in her life. It's like she thinks wearing mask- she thinks protecting oneself in this very, like this special period, she needs to communicate with others. But we think protect ourselves can be isolating ourselves, like it's fine to be alone, we can use WeChat videocall like internet is already enough to communicate with others, but how to really protect ourselves is to stay in home by yourself, is fully covering ourselves, is getting physically isolated from the outside world. But it seems westerner protect ourselves is like, I need to not only feel physically comfortable but also emotionally comfortable, under this circumstance then I can protect, something like this.
17 T: Good good so okay I think the interpretation you said just now makes lots of sense.

This extract starts with the teacher inviting students to revisit the "self-protection" statement and formulate a new understanding. However, what follows is a long silence of 11 seconds, which prompts the teacher to make some efforts to make the question more accessible in line 2. She switches her instruction language from English to Chinese and rewords the question in a way that makes it more concrete. Compared with the sole request for "new understanding" and "new interpretation" in line 1, the teacher acknowledges some plausibility in the statement by "这个肯定是一方面" (this of course is one aspect) but at the same time requests for something that is "更完善" (more complete), indicating there is something lacking in it. She also provides some scaffolding to help students reformulate that statement, drawing their attention to alternative perceptions of face masks by asking them to take into consideration American people's perceptions. Despite the teacher's effort, the students still have difficulty in understanding the question. In line 3, S1 questions what the teacher meant by "更完善" (more complete). In response to the student's need for further clarification, the teacher explains and specifies her question in line 4. She points out the inapplicability of the "self-protection" statement to the American context and indicates that the reason for this inapplicability lies in a problem in the statement. In addition, she affirms the first part of it with "absolutely protecting yourself is human nature" and treats this as the common ground that she shares with the students, and then asks them to account for American people's different practice. By directing students' attention to the inapplicability of the "self-protection" statement to the American context, the teacher provides a form of scaffolding that helps students rethink it in terms of cultural difference. This scaffolding helps students engage in reflection, as evidenced by S3's early response in line 5. There is a mid-turn overlap where S3 selects herself as the next speaker before the teacher completes the question, which shows the student's confidence in understanding the question and doing the reflection. The teacher's specification of the problem of the "self-protection" statement enables students to recognize the sociocultural dimension of people's perceptions and practices of buying masks. In S3's response, she attributes different behaviors concerning buying masks to different cultural perceptions of the significance of wearing masks, which shows some intercultural awareness.

However, by bringing in the national category "American" in line 4, the teacher also perpetuates an essentialist understanding of cultural difference and models intercultural reflection in terms of an us-them dichotomy. This essentialist effect is manifest in the subsequent student response. S3 formulates her understanding of the behavior of not/buying masks in terms of an America-versus-China contrast. She claims that American people do not consider face masks important, so "they" do not panic buy masks, whereas Chinese people hold the opposite view so "we" would bulk buy masks. She also treats the different cultural evaluation of the significance of wearing masks as the only and inherent factor that would influence people's perceptions and practices of buying masks. This is implied by

her repeated use of the adverbial "本质上" (essentially, inherently) to modify the cultural contrast she makes. This shows an essentialist view of culture as an unchanging entity in a deterministic relation to individuals' practice (Holliday, 2011), homogenizing the American and Chinese national groups and overgeneralizes the phenomena of (not) buying and wearing masks. While taking the nation as an analytic unit can be plausible in teaching, it is problematic to naturalize a particular discourse on face masks as immanent in a national group, which ignores the fact that cultural perceptions and practices are politically, historically and discursively constructed and operate differentially and transnationally (Risager, 2017).

Moving to lines 6–10, an interactional problem appears during which, regardless of what students say, the teacher repeats the same question albeit with some minor rewording. In line 6 after S3's contribution, the teacher requests the student again to rephrase the "self-protection" statement to make it make "more sense," without providing any concrete feedback on their responses. However, notably, the teacher starts the turn with an attempt to build on S3. By "so you think," she seems to recast the student's comment. However, she then encounters trouble in speaking, dropping the sentence halfway and initiating a repair by a lengthened filler "emmm." After this, she abandons the problematic utterance and restarts by explicitly expressing the need for more time to think of what she could say. Despite the prolonged thinking time, the teacher gives up recasting what S3 said but rather resort to her original question, asking students to "rephrase" "the previous interpretation" that is, the "self-protection" statement to make it "更加 make sense" (make more sense).

However, asking students to make more sense indicates a problem of clarity and meaningfulness in what they said and invalidates the students' ideas. Such a framing of the question can be confusing because the statement can be considered fairly clear and easy to understand. It is unclear what the teacher finds not making sense in that statement. As a result, S2 shows great confusion about the teacher's question in line 7 where she tries to negotiate with the teacher what the question means and what they need to rephrase. In response, the teacher repeats the "self-protection" statement and once again asks for reformulation. The teacher's repetition of the task results in S2's recognition of the influence of the media discourses on their perception of face masks. This student's answer can be a constructive response to the task of analyzing the statement because the student shows some awareness of the socially discursively constructed nature of it. In addition, the student contributes to modelling a way of concretizing reflection. By checking if the teacher wants to hear further examples in terms of what discourses specifically have influenced Chinese people's perceptions related to face masks, she offers the class a collective learning opportunity to think of the discursive aspect of the "self-protection" statement and articulate their reflection on it with enhanced sophistication. However, instead of commenting on S2's answer or responding to the student's question, the teacher repeats the request for reformulating the statement, asking the student to analyse what may be implausible in it.

In lines 1 to 10, while the teacher attempts to engage students in reflecting on the problem in the "self -protection" statement and reformulating it, students are not generating the types of response that the teacher expects to see. Although S3's answer in line 5 and S2's in line 7 can be seen as valid responses to this reflective task, it seems the teacher does not think so. Instead of building on student contributions, the teacher regresses to her original question and repeats the same questioning technique. This may suggest that the teacher is not equipped with the type of classroom discourse resources and strategies and questioning techniques that she needs in order to shift the focus of students' reflection to the one she would like them to engage with. Nonetheless, this shows more than the inadequacy on the teacher's part but also some real dilemma that practitioners may face in actual practice of intercultural language teaching, that is, tensions between the multiple goals of intercultural language learning.

In this extract, the conflict appears between the goal of getting students to reflect on a particular point about the "self-protection" statement that the teacher has identified and the goal of mediating students' thinking in a way that supports them to reflect on the points they want to reflect on. The teacher's strict adherence to the former goal makes it difficult for her to see the validity in students' contributions. As a result, she gives excessive emphasis on the pre-defined outcome of learning over

the process of learning to use language to think. While there is no easy solution to the dilemma, what can be said is that while it is important to prepare a focus in advance, it is also important to recognize students' contributions and be more responsive to the contingency of classroom interaction. Significantly, the goal of critical reflection in intercultural language teaching and learning is less to reach definitive outcomes in the form of agreed answers than to develop personally meaningful understandings of language and culture with increased sophistication (Díaz, 2013; Liddicoat, 2020). Such understandings cannot be pre-defined by the teacher but are developed intersubjectively in classroom interaction. It is crucial for practitioners of intercultural language teaching to go beyond the traditional teacher role as the "epistemic authority" exerting tight control over the process and the product of knowledge creation (Patchen & Smithenry, 2014). Instead, teachers should take a more dialogic orientation to knowledge and enable students to not just superficially participate in knowledge building but actually shape and contribute to it. In the case here, this means the teacher needs to go beyond superficial dialogue where she invites student voices but still tightly controls the direction and focus of reflection. Instead, she needs to grant students some autonomy in deciding what they would like to reflect on in the "self-protection" statement and support their reflection on the things that are significant to them.

The exchange in lines 11–17 demonstrates another example of what it may mean to develop dialogicity (Mortimer & Scott, 2003) in interculturally-oriented teaching. In this interaction, the teacher stops repeating the original question and tells students her own understanding of the problem in the "self-protection" statement. Her explanation scaffolds students' thinking and results in unsolicited student reflection.

In response to the teacher's request to identify the problem in the "self-protection" statement, S3 responds in line 11 with a more elaborated reflection on it. Although it looks similar to her previous answer in line 5, the student adds a further detail, an alternative meaning related to face masks: in some foreign contexts, people believe face masks should be saved for frontline doctors. Building on S3, the teacher recasts the student contribution as an issue of different cultural perceptions of "protecting oneself" in line 12 and further elaborates on that in line 14: although protecting oneself is human nature, protecting oneself does not necessarily mean buying masks, because of different cultural views in terms of what can be seen as protecting oneself, and that is why that statement does not apply to the American context.

Although the teacher does not elicit further student reflection, her elaboration results in S2's self-initiated reflection. In line 15, S2 overlaps the teacher's turn and produces Aaah with the lengthened vowel, which indicates that she comes to realize something that she did not realize before. In line 16, S2 continues explaining what she has realized, building on the teacher's explanation by further concretizing the idea of different cultural perceptions of protecting oneself and connecting it with a video that the teacher showed them earlier in the workshop. In that video, an American woman cries about her distress over wearing face masks (see the Appendix). With reference to the woman's account, S2 demonstrates an emic understanding of the cultural other, explaining that for that woman, protecting oneself means communicating with others and entails emotional support from the outside world. She then compares what protecting oneself means in a western context with what it means in the Chinese cultural context, articulating that for Chinese people, protecting oneself means physical protection through isolating oneself from the outside world. Although the Western-versus-China framework she takes is still problematic, the student shows significant learning and develops her reflection with greater sophistication.

What is remarkable in this interaction is how the teacher's explanation in 14 leads to S2's unsolicited reflection. The teacher's utterance takes the form of an assertion, using "所以才" (that's actually why) and "之所以…是因为" (the reason why … is actually because) to emphasize the "trueness" of the answer she provides. In its form, the teacher's turn is not very different from traditional teacher feedback that presents itself as the standard answer and is designed in a way that closes the sequence. Nonetheless, it functions as "a seed for dialogicity" (Mortimer & Scott, 2003), as it prompts S2 to actively expand the sequence. In comparison with the exchanges in lines 5-10 where the teacher's talk takes an interactional form but excludes student contributions from the final product of

knowledge building, the talk in line 14 takes a more authoritative form but empowers S2 to reflect further. What differentiates the turn 14 from the former lies in the specificity of the focus of reflection pinpointed in that turn. By highlighting what exactly students need to reflect on, the teacher provides a scaffold for students to engage with the focus of reflection that the teacher has prepared. The introduction of the concept "protecting oneself" provides an example of languaging, as it allows students to externalize their unsaid assumptions about wearing masks in language. This concept serves as a point of connection between linguistic representation and cultural meaning, between their own culture and the target culture, and between the current reflective task and their previous learning experience. The concept also offers new interpretive resource that students need in order to become aware of and decenter from the perspective in the "self-protection" statement and to reframe the interpretation of the video of the American woman with greater sophistication, thereby reflecting on and expanding part of their existing interpretive framework regarding "protecting oneself."

## Discussion

Upon examining the classroom practices in the critical incidents in relation to Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) conceptualization of an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching, it is notable that the two episodes show the teacher's partial and superficial realization of an interpretive stance to intercultural language teaching.

In the first instance, although the questions used to elicit students' personal interpretations treated intercultural language learning as a personalization process, the potential of these questions was hindered by the limited semiotic richness of the material used by the teacher. Due to the lack of affordances for meaning-making in the material, the questions being asked appeared highly decontextualized and detached from students' actual experiences and treated learners' prior knowledge as static internal memories that one stores and retrieves at will. However, one's knowledge only comes into being in contextualized acts of knowing when a certain situation triggers and activates it (Wells, 1999). In intercultural language teaching and learning, reflection on prior cultural knowledge can only become productive when being related to its contextualized use in acts of interpreting. Without a social semiotic stance towards language and culture in material selection and design and without contextualized treatment of knowledge and knowing, the intercultural language teaching in the first episode only resulted in overgeneralized and stereotypical representations of cultures and of self and others.

In the second instance, despite the teacher's explicit endeavor to mediate students' critical reflection on their cultural assumptions, there appeared a tension between competing agendas during the classroom interactional process—guiding students towards a specific planned focal point for reflection and supporting student reflection on things that emerged in classroom interaction. On top of that, although the teacher strived to redirect the interaction to the desired focus of reflection, the focus remained very vague to students and the interaction came to a standstill as a consequence of focusing excessively on the product of reflection, a definitive result of re-interpretation. However, mediation of meaning-making would require not merely an interactional format encouraging learner talk, but more importantly a dialogic stance towards the knowledge building process where the teacher responds to classroom contingency, allowing students to shape the direction of discussion and the focus of reflection (McConachy, 2018).

These findings suggest that intercultural language teaching in practice requires an integral and holistic treatment of, for example, a social semiotic view of language and culture, a sociocultural perspective on learning as personal experiential meaning-making, a dynamic stance towards knowledge as used in acts of knowing, a critical reflexive stance towards interpretations, and a dialogic stance towards knowledge building (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Liddicoat, 2020, 2022). Pre-service language teachers may attend to one dimension while overlooking others in their operationalization of an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching. It is necessary for teachers to reason about pedagogical design and practice in consideration of all these aspects. The idea of integration resonates with Kohler's (2020) encapsulation of intercultural language teaching as a pedagogical stance that entails multiple interrelated aspects or "parameters" (Kumaravadivelu, 2005), including "multilingual and intercultural," "persons and personalization," "knowledge and knowing,"

"mediation and meaning-making," "transformation through critical reflection."

Within pre-service language teacher education, it may be useful to support pre-service language teachers in practicing pedagogical reasoning (Johnson et al., 2022) through concrete classroom-based examples with reference to those parameters. It requires teacher educators to move beyond concepts and principles of intercultural language teaching and learning and guide student teachers in task/lesson design and analyze how multiple parameters come into play in the design. It is also desirable to give student teachers an opportunity to practice mediating students' interpretations, for example in micro peer teaching, and reflect on what and how important concepts, principles, and parameters are enacted through classroom language use.

## Conclusion

This self-study explored my own initial experiment of intercultural language teaching as a pre-service language teacher within a classroom setting. The investigation focused on the nature of the challenges associated with enacting an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching, which were revealed through two critical incidents. Previous studies that have investigated classroom practice of novices of intercultural language teaching focus predominantly on in-service teachers whose main challenges are related to reforming existing institutional traditions, curricula and practices and integrating intercultural language teaching in a way that suits the local contexts (Díaz, 2013; Kohler, 2015; Siregar, 2016). In comparison, this self-study contributes to an understanding of the challenges faced by a pre-service language teacher in translating theoretical knowledge of intercultural language teaching into practice. The in-depth analysis of classroom language use has modelled a way for pre-service language teachers to navigate between theory and practice.

Naturally, a self-study such as this has limitations in terms of the extent to which it can represent the challenges faced by pre-service language teachers more generally. This study is also limited by the decision to examine classroom interactions only, without triangulating the data with other sources such as participants' commentaries on the episodes and their broader views on this kind of learning, the role of the teacher etc. A more comprehensive understanding of the pre-service language teacher's professional learning could have been achieved by considering the participants' own understanding of an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching in view of their classroom interactional experiences, especially given that they are aspiring teachers themselves. Despite this limitation, this study contributes to the field through detailed classroom discourse analysis, enhancing understanding of the professional learning process of pre-service language teachers with respect to applying the theory of an interpretive perspective on intercultural language teaching in practice.

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## Appendix

**Model the signifying practice. Learn to analyze language and culture as the symbolic system.**
Watch the video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1T8ka9rXgw&feature=youtu.be
Look at the transcript of the video.

- 45 minutes having it on. It's first time I worn one. I am disoriented. I'm a little mad if you can't tell that already. I' m very I'm frustrated that I don't feel good physically. I can tell you right now. I wasn't getting enough oxygen and I just had on one of these little stupid things. I feel dizzy. My hands are kind of tingly. My heart is beating fast, so some of it is an emotional reaction but some of it is a physical reaction.
- I understand the virus is real. Ok I understand the virus is real. Friends look at the numbers and tell me why's everybody's living in fear, tell me when we're putting these things on and not being able to breathe.
- I just wanna cry. That's all I want to do is cry because you can't see people's faces. You can't make human connection. We can't hug people. We can't hold our babies.
- I'm at the end of it. I'm just simply at the end of it. It doesn't make sense. This doesn't make sense and it's I'm not ok with it. Nothing about what we're doing is supported by the numbers that are out there.
- Those of you that know me I am one of the most compassionate caring people you ever meet and I do care about you. But I also care about me and my children and my family and I do care about my rights. And it's probably the last time I'm wearing this because I feel terrible I feel emotionally terrible but I feel physical it affected me.