

## Introduction

The articles in this volume dealing with intercultural encounters in the classroom cover a wide variety of topics from different areas of the subject, illustrating how all-pervading our preoccupation with the concept of interculturality has become. The contributions range from reflections on a version of the European Language Portfolio that incorporates an enhanced intercultural dimension, to descriptions of staff-guided student translation projects that turn students themselves into their own Ciceroni on their journey into new cultural territory, reflections on a new method for teaching intercultural awareness (Intercultural Anchored Inquiry), and the re-reading of a canonical literary text, demonstrating its relevance to issues of cultural contact and transcultural hybridity.

**Nyemb's** article sees the eponymous Tonio Kröger as “*sujet miste*,” caught in a tug-of-war between the dual and seemingly incompatible claims of his heritage, his mother's Dionysian southernness and father's Prussian northernness. In this reading, Kröger becomes an exemplary mediator between cultures, who finds a way of, if not synthesizing these mutually exclusive identities, then of “*pend[eln] zwischen den Kulturen*.”

In **O'Reilly's** article on IAI she makes the case for a shift in focus from learning outcomes (in an outcome-driven time) to teaching method, specifically teaching methods that foreground the importance of individual and individualized learner reflection. This is perhaps nowhere more important than in the area of intercultural competence, with O'Reilly arguing that self-reflection is the mode most appropriate to its attainment. If by its very nature intercultural learning means encouraging students to reflect on their own experiences, preconceptions, and conceptual aporiae, modifying and working through these in group discussion and with the help of input from academic research(ers), then, O'Reilly argues, the method of anchored inquiry, which uses so-called “critical incidents” to trigger the process of reflection, is one method particularly well-suited to this subject matter.

A similar point is made by **Bruen and Sudhershnan** in their analysis of the LOLIPOP European Language Portfolio, an online learning module that allows students to record their developing foreign language and intercultural competence, and chart its future course. They also emphasize the vital importance of methods that encourage ongoing learner reflection on the learning process, especially in the case of intercultural awareness, and see in the LOLIPOP ELP an opportunity for such structured yet autonomous self-guided discovery.

Revealing something of a golden thread linking the different contributions on classroom intercultural encounters, **Carthy's** project description also focuses on a fruitful admixture of student self-guided learning (here the tandem language learning experience in Letterkenny IT) and structured intervention in the form of an e-learning initiative. The “intercultural exchanges online” project required tandem partners to conduct interviews in a set of target languages on foreign exchange students' experiences of Ireland, with the student pairs recording and transcribing the results. This material was then made available online as a corpus of texts for use

both by learners who want to improve their linguistic and intercultural competence, and potentially also by researchers in the fields of linguistics and intercultural communication. As in the “Vocationally Oriented Culture and Language (VOCAL)” project of **Brogen et al.**, which is developing an online module allowing students to prepare themselves linguistically and culturally for their year abroad, these initiatives are all characterized by a clever fusion of learner autonomy and guided discovery. The guidance is either provided in the form of a carefully structured online module (in the case of VOCAL, designed by producing a needs analysis on the basis of feedback from past exchange students) or in the form of input from more experienced researchers (or translators), but the learner is ultimately in control of his or her learning destiny and the learning outcome, with instruction taking the form less of prescriptive teaching than of facilitation of what is otherwise an autonomous environment driven by the learner’s desire for discovery.

Translation is a time-honoured and still important form of intercultural contact, communication and learning. Particularly in the case of very culturally-specific material, translation puts not only linguistic but intercultural competence to the most demanding test. Wilhelm Raabe (1831-1920) has a reputation as a uniquely challenging author in both of these respects, with his texts often considered almost impenetrable even by native speaker standards. Although his previously untranslated short story *Deutscher Mondschein* announces itself as quintessentially German, it subverts the very clichés and preconceptions about Germanness and German Romanticism that it invokes. **Martin and Ritterson** set themselves and their students the challenge of communicating what is a linguistically dense and culturally charged text into the terms of a different and temporally removed cultural and linguistic system. Having met at a conference on the author in Maynooth in 2006, these two Raabe-enthusiasts and teachers of translation decided to use this in many ways most unlikely of texts to test and develop their students’ linguistic and intercultural adeptness, resulting in not only a first English version published here, but also one of the very few English Raabe translations available. What is interesting in the case of this project too is its emphasis on (assisted) student self-navigation through foreign material and contexts, their relative independence yielding more tailor-made and hence worthwhile linguistic and intercultural insights.

**Witte**’s contribution looks at the idea of a formalised intercultural component in structured foreign language teaching. The intercultural competence in which this process should result, he argues, not only consists of knowledge about the foreign target culture and language, but also of a general awareness of the fundamental interdependence of culture, thought and language. ‘Intercultural speakers’ must be able to reflect upon the cultural determinedness of their own mental patterns and communicative habits, and to question monocultural categories.

Katja Warchold’s interview with Jana **Hensel**, author of *Zonenkinder*, which established her as a post-Wende DDR author, can also be seen in intercultural terms in the widest sense. Hensel is, after all, an author who reflects on diachronic cultural (mis)communication, the culture in question in *Zonenkinder* being an increasingly Ostalgie-coloured East of the past that is now home to the seemingly endless eu- and

dys-topian projections of the present. As Hensel points out, pigeonholing her as an author of the DDR past is, in fact, a (very symptomatic) mistake. *Zonenkinder*, she claims, although set in the erstwhile DDR, actually expresses more about the present in which it was written – in short it is our own time and culture that are being mediated to us via the foreign country of the past. Hensel does not want or try to resurrect intact a now dead time and place, but rather to use it to describe and understand, for the purposes of the present, encounters between what she calls differently coded realities. Similarly, in her work *Neue deutsche Mädchen*, it is her intention “auf eine zeitgenössische Art [Feminismus] neu zu erzählen,” rather than to resurrect intact a feminism encoded in the now obsolete concerns and terms of, say, the 1960s, which would only serve to alienate a modern generation of women desperately in need of their own appropriately-coded feminism.

In the more general contributions to this volume, Nils Langer and Dirk Köhler both reflect on language use, in **Langer’s** case demonstrating that the idea of immanent *Sprachverfall*, language decay, is both centuries old as well as less linguistic reality than perennial sociolinguistic phenomenon. He argues that the recurring idea (made perhaps even more prevalent in our day by such popular works as Bastian Sick’s enormously successful *Der Dativ ist dem Genitiv sein Tod*) that a language in any given period of time is under attack and in danger of being entirely lost, fails to recognize that all language is in constant flux, and is furthermore predicated on mistaken notions of (past) linguistic purity and intactness.

**Köhler** has conducted an empirical study in the area of address theory, and investigates the factors that determine the use of first names in communicative interactions. The results of his statistical analysis allow correlations to be made between factors such as age difference, degree of familiarity, and the permission to use informal forms of address.

The next volume of *Germanistik in Ireland* (2010) will be a special issue entitled *Sexual-Textual Border-Crossings: Lesbian Identity in German Literature, Film, and Culture*. Guest editors of this volume are Carrie Smith-Prei (NUI Maynooth) and Cordula Politis (Trinity College Dublin). As this volume is already complete, contributions are now invited for the 2011 issue entitled *Nach der Postmoderne*. As always, articles on other subjects are also welcome.

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Florian Krobb  
Rachel MagShamhráin  
Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannisa