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FOSTERING INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS: ADDRESSING IDENTITY IN THE CEFR COMPANION VOLUME

ABSTRACT:

This paper explores how intercultural competence and identity are addressed in the Companion Volume of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2020a). Through a thematic analysis of its descriptors, the study examines the conceptualisation of these two themes and their implications for fostering plurilingual and pluricultural language education. In particular, building on Michael Byram's critique (2023) of the concept of identity in the Companion Volume, the analysis highlights some of the limitations of current descriptors and their impact on teaching practices. The paper argues for a more comprehensive integration of the two concepts of identity and intercultural awareness to better prepare students for the complexities of increasingly diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Finally, it aims to contribute to the reflection on the development of pedagogical approaches that align with the demands of global education and the evolving role of language centres in higher education.

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ABSTRACT:

Il presente contributo esplora il modo in cui la competenza interculturale e l'identità sono trattate nel Volume Complementare del Quadro Comune Europeo di Riferimento per le lingue (Consiglio d'Europa 2020a). Attraverso un'analisi tematica dei descrittori, lo studio esamina la concettualizzazione di questi due temi e le loro implicazioni per la realizzazione di un'educazione linguistica plurilingue e pluriculturale. In particolare, a partire dalla critica di Michael Byram (2023) al concetto di identità contenuto nel Volume Complementare, l'analisi evidenzia alcuni limiti degli attuali descrittori e il loro impatto sulle pratiche didattiche. Si sostiene la necessità di un'integrazione più completa dei due concetti di identità e di consapevolezza interculturale per preparare meglio gli studenti alle complessità di contesti linguistici e culturali sempre più diversificati. Infine, questo studio si propone di contribuire alla riflessione sullo sviluppo di approcci pedagogici che siano in linea con le esigenze di un'educazione internazionale, e con l'evoluzione del ruolo dei centri linguistici nell'istruzione superiore.

1. INTRODUCTION

Identity is a fundamental aspect of language learning, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and others within intercultural interactions. In the context of language learning, identity is not a fixed or monolithic construct, but a dynamic and multifaceted concept shaped by cultural, linguistic, and social elements. Learners draw from their pluricultural repertoire — a combination of experiences, knowledge, and practices across various cultures — to navigate and construct meaning in intercultural communication (Beacco *et. al.* 2016). This viewpoint is consistent with a plurilingual approach, which recognises that language learners do not compartmentalise their languages and cultures but instead use them fluidly to construct and express their identities. Understanding this fluidity is critical to promoting inclusive and context-sensitive language education. In an increasingly interconnected world, language education is more than just linguistic proficiency; it is also about developing intercultural awareness and understanding. For the past twenty years, one of the tools that has been used in language education is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001) and, recently, its Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020a), with the aim of addressing the complexities of identity and intercultural competence. The CEFR Companion Volume introduces new, valuable descriptors not only for skills such as reception and production (which replace the four traditional ones), but also for interaction, mediation, and, most importantly, pluricultural competence. Despite the widespread use of the CEFR and

the adoption of its principles, the extent to which they succeed in helping learners develop their skills has been critically examined. For instance, according to Michael Byram (2023), these new descriptors may not sufficiently capture the complexities of reality and diversity in contemporary educational contexts. In his analysis, he highlights the Companion Volume's limitations in adequately addressing identity, claiming that it fails to build on the more nuanced understanding present in the original CEFR version. Byram emphasises the need for a more detailed description of learners' identities and a deeper investigation of pluricultural competence. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the treatment of identity in the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020a), specifically, how effectively it supports the development of pluricultural, plurilingual, and intercultural educational practices.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following paragraphs situate this study within ongoing debates about learners' language identities by addressing three concepts that can help shape interactions between speakers from different linguistic backgrounds: identity, intercultural competence, and plurilingualism and pluriculturalism. Since each of them has been broadly described by research, their definitions and implications for language learning are only considered in relation to the purpose of this study, the examination of the CEFR Companion Volume (CV), and the extent to which it can be used to help university language centres and their practitioners.

Identity in language learning is a dynamic and multifaceted concept that emerges from learners' interactions with various linguistic and cultural contexts. Norton's seminal work defines identity as «the way a person understands their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future» (2013: 45). Norton's work (2013) emphasises the relationship between identity and language investment, asserting that learners' willingness to engage with language is deeply connected to their sense of belonging and self-perception within various communities. In the context of language learning, identity is not static but is continuously negotiated through social interactions, cultural experiences, and language practices. This identity for plurilingual speakers and learners is based on their pluricultural repertoire (Beacco *et. al.* 2016), a set of communicative skills, processes, and strategies related to different cultures that help them navigate and construct meaning in their relationships, particularly in international settings where intercultural communication occurs. However, according to Runnells, pluriculturalism should be viewed as the acknowledgement and comprehension of individuals' diverse perspectives, and a «pluricultural repertoire is therefore linked to one's own life experience with the caveat that individuals can develop very different repertoires (both plurilingual and pluricultural) even though they were born in the same place, live in the same neighbourhood, speak the same

languages, have the same interests and experienced the same type of (formal or informal) education» (2021: 11).

These concepts – i.e. identity, plurilingualism and pluriculturalism – are connected with some of the main purposes of the CEFR CV, which is meant to help learners develop their understanding and awareness of other languages and their own identity as speakers and users, and of their active role in society as promoters of dialogue among people with diverse backgrounds. In fact, learners' engagement and participation align with the CEFR and CEFR CV's (Council of Europe 2001, 2020a) conceptualisation of learners as 'social agents' who navigate multiple cultural and linguistic affiliations (North 2020).

Language centres play a significant role in higher education by creating an environment where students can reflect on their linguistic and cultural experiences. Language centres can help students become more aware of their proficiencies and how they contribute to their overall identity as plurilingual speakers. This process involves not only linguistic competence but also intercultural awareness, as learners negotiate their identities within and across different cultural contexts (Byram 2023). Intercultural competence can be defined as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from various cultural backgrounds. According to Byram (1997), intercultural competence consists of five key components: open and curious attitudes, knowledge of one's own and other cultures, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness (the ability to evaluate cultural practices and products). One significant addition to the CEFR Companion Volume is the development of the concept of mediation, which is defined as the speaker's ability to act as an intermediary in a variety of linguistic and cultural contexts (North/Piccardo 2016). Mediation involves creating a shared space for communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, emphasising the importance of empathy, respect, and the ability to resolve conflicts arising from cultural misunderstandings. Schneider (2020) observes that the Companion Volume includes new mediation scales that align with Byram's (1997) concept of intercultural communicative competence, his emphasis on critical cultural awareness and the ability to mediate between various cultural perspectives. However, Schneider (2020) claims that the Companion Volume makes no explicit mention of critical cultural awareness, which Byram regards as essential to intercultural competence (1997). Critical cultural awareness requires the ability to critically evaluate one's own and others' cultural practices, resulting in a better understanding of the sociopolitical dimensions of intercultural communication (Byram 1997). Schneider (2020) also criticises the CEFR Companion Volume for its lack of engagement with the sociopolitical dimensions of identity and intercultural competence, arguing that the descriptors provided in the Companion Volume are heavily focused on communicative outcomes, neglecting the internal, identity-driven aspects of intercultural interactions. This critique is in line with Byram's (2023) advocacy for a more nuan-

ced understanding of identity that takes into account learners' diverse affiliations, linguistic histories, and self-concepts. The absence of all these concepts in the Companion Volume may limit its ability to fully support the development of intercultural competence in language learners. Schneider (2020) further underlines that the CEFR Companion Volume introduces new descriptors for mediation, plurilingualism, and pluricultural competence, but these descriptors often focus on observable behaviours rather than the deeper, identity-driven aspects of intercultural interaction. For example, the descriptors for «Facilitating pluricultural space» (Council of Europe 2020a: 114-115) require learners to create a neutral, trusted, and shared space and emphasise skills like managing ambiguity and resolving misunderstandings, but fail to address how learners negotiate their own cultural identities in intercultural encounters.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs a qualitative research design, using thematic analysis to examine the CEFR Companion Volume and compare the findings with the related literature. Thematic analysis is well-suited to investigating complex, multidimensional issues because it allows for the identification of patterns and relationships within the data (Braun/Clarke 2006). The primary data source is the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020a), supplemented by relevant academic literature, including works by Byram (2023), Schneider (2020) and Runnels (2021). The data was organised and coded using NVivo software, which made it easier to create a thematic index. The analysis followed the six-step framework for thematic analysis proposed by Braun/Clarke (2012: 60-69):

1. Familiarisation with the data: Read and reread the CEFR Companion Volume to gain a thorough understanding of the materials.
2. Generating initial codes: Identify and label key concepts and themes within the data.
3. Searching for themes: Organise codes into broader themes that capture the essence of the data.
4. Reviewing themes: Refine and revise themes to ensure they accurately represent the data.
5. Defining and naming themes: Clearly describe each theme by assigning a descriptive name.
6. Producing the report: Write up the findings, supported by evidence from the data analysed and compared with the related literature.

The main research questions guiding this analysis are: (1) How is intercultural competence defined and addressed in the CEFR Companion Volume? (2) How can university language centres help plurilingual and pluricultural students develop their language identities?

The following section examines the role of intercultural competence (IC) and identity within the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020a), focusing on how concepts which may be related to intercultural awareness are embedded in the descriptors.

3. ANALYSING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES IN THE CEFR COMPANION VOLUME

The analysis is based on the thematic coding of elements related to intercultural competence (IC) across four communicative skills and competencies, as illustrated below (cf. Fig. 1). The graph represents the distribution of codes within different skill categories of the corresponding CEFR CV's chapters (Council of Europe 2020a), namely: Production (61–70); Interaction (71–89); Mediation (90–122); Plurilingual Competence (123–128).

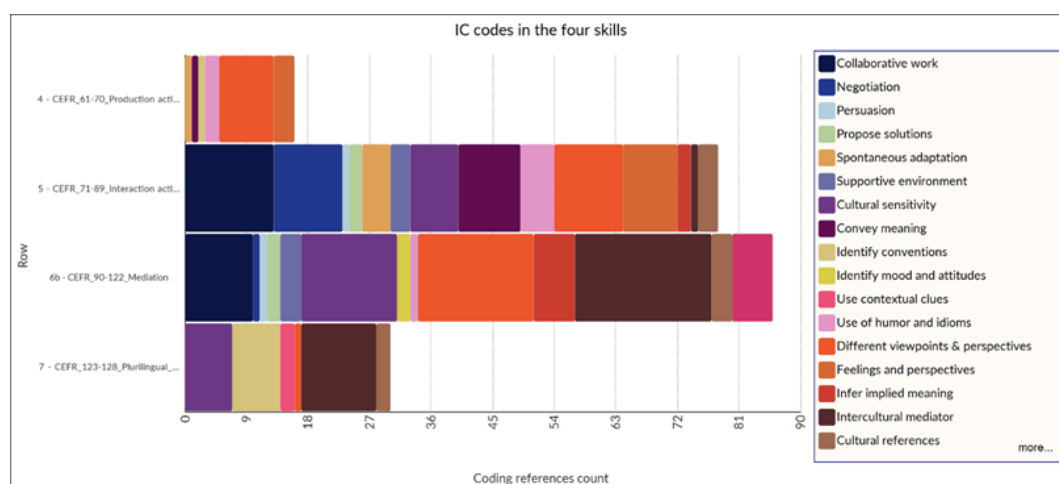


Fig. 1. IC codes in four selected skills - Stacked bar chart and thematic categories.

The graph is structured as a stacked bar chart, where each row corresponds to a set of descriptors grouped by skill category, while the colour-coded segments indicate the presence of specific IC-related themes. The x-axis contains a list of coding references and their numbers, showing the frequency with which specific elements belonging to IC appear for each of the skills considered. The codes represent recurring themes identified in the CEFR Companion's descriptors, and each bar segment corresponds to the frequency (count) of codes assigned to a skill, reflecting their emphasis in the framework. The table below shows the thematic categories found in the text analysed and sorted by total frequency, from the highest to the lowest (cf. Tab. 1):

Category	Production (CEFR CV: 61-70)	Interaction (CEFR CV: 71-89)	Mediation (CEFR CV: 90-122)	Plurilingual/ cultural (CEFR CV: 123-128)	Total n° of frequency
Different viewpoints & perspectives	8	10	17	1	36
Intercultural mediator	0	1	20	11	32
Cultural sensitivity	0	7	14	7	28
Collaborative work	0	13	10	0	23
Negotiation	0	10	1	0	11
Feelings and perspectives	3	8	0	0	11
Convey meaning	1	9	0	0	10
Cultural references	0	3	3	2	8
Infer implied meaning	0	2	6	0	8
Use of humour and idioms	2	5	1	0	8
Identify conventions	1	0	0	7	8
Sociocultural implications	0	0	6	0	6
Supportive environment	0	3	3	0	6
Spontaneous adaptation	1	4	0	0	5
Propose solutions	0	2	2	0	4
Persuasion	0	1	1	0	2
Identify mood and attitudes	0	0	2	0	2
Use contextual clues	0	0	0	2	2

Tab. 1. Number of coding references based on the theme ‘intercultural competence’ (IC).

The CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020a) analysis identifies intercultural competence as a component of communicative language activities and strategies. The coded data show varying degrees of presence across various categories, with certain competencies appearing more frequently than others, indicating their centrality to effective communication across cultures. The coding analysis for IC (Figure 1) reveals that ‘Interaction’ and ‘Mediation’ skills contain the highest con-

centration of elements related to IC, particularly regarding collaborative work, cultural sensitivity, and the need to consider different perspectives. Categories such as ‘Different Viewpoints and Perspectives’ (36 total occurrences), ‘Cultural Sensitivity’ (28) and ‘Collaborative work’ (23) emerged as essential across the four skills examined. ‘Cultural Sensitivity’ (28) ensures that learners can navigate interactions respectfully, while skills such as ‘Collaborative Work’ (23) reflect the interactive nature of communication in multilingual contexts. These abilities are particularly relevant in discussions, debates, and team-based problem-solving, reinforcing the importance of cooperation in language learning. Alongside this, ‘Infer Implied Meaning’ (8 total occurrences) plays a key role in developing deeper comprehension, requiring learners to recognise subtleties beyond the literal text. ‘Identify Mood and Attitudes’ (2), which means the ability to interpret emotional cues in discourse, does not appear frequently, although it should be considered essential for creating emotional connections in meaningful interactions. In contrast, the two categories, ‘Supportive environment’ (6) and ‘Sociocultural Implications’ (6), appear less frequently. While these competencies are important features for individuals with advanced proficiency, their lower presence suggests that they may be considered more relevant in higher levels of language acquisition rather than foundational stages. Similarly, ‘Propose solutions’ (2) is not prominent, possibly because it pertains to specific roles within intercultural facilitation rather than general communicative abilities.

In the chapter dedicated to ‘Interaction,’ categories such as ‘Negotiation’ of meanings (10 occurrences in the descriptors of that chapter) and ‘Feelings and perspectives’ (8) are also strongly represented. Their high frequency underscores the importance given to considering people’s emotional engagement, cognitive flexibility, and ability to establish mutual understanding in intercultural communication. Similarly, the category ‘Conveying Meaning’ (9) focuses on clarifying messages despite potential linguistic difficulties and cultural barriers. These results indicate that intercultural competence in the Companion Volume is predominantly shaped by skills that enhance mutual understanding and adaptability. These elements are crucial in ensuring that learners can learn to adjust to new communicative contexts while maintaining a positive and inclusive atmosphere (Baker 2015).

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings suggest that language educators should focus on developing core intercultural competencies, particularly those that support collaboration, interaction, and adaptability. The category labelled as ‘Intercultural Mediator,’ which is frequently referenced in the ‘Mediation’ descriptors, suggests that practitioners and language centres could use some descriptors of the CEFR CV (Council of Europe 2020a) to help learners become cultural mediators, perhaps by encouraging them to engage in plurilingual interactions and reflect on their evolving linguistic identities through guided discussions and portfolio-based activities, as suggested by Runnels (2021). The frequently occurring competencies can be an indication of their practical relevance in everyday communication, while less frequent

competencies may be developed through targeted instruction in specialised contexts. Overall, the distribution of these competencies within the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020a) may be used to adopt a structured approach to fostering intercultural awareness, aligning with the broader goal of preparing learners for real-world multilingual interactions.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

A key issue emerging from the analysis is the Companion Volume's (Council of Europe 2020a) limited conceptualisation of identity. While scholars such as Norton (2013) consider identity as fluid and socially constructed, the Companion Volume does not fully integrate this perspective into its descriptors (Byram 2023). Instead, it tends to focus on functional language use, omitting considerations of how learners negotiate and reshape their identities through plurilingual and intercultural interactions (Byram 2006). This oversight becomes more evident in its mediation descriptors, where competence is defined primarily as the ability to mediate between cultural perspectives (i.e., 'Intercultural Mediator') rather than an ongoing process of identity negotiation. As Byram points out in his critique, «these skills do not include understanding of the social identities of themselves or those for whom they mediate, nor of the relationship of individuals to social groups. More attention to the concept of 'intercultural awareness' as presented in the CEFR might have led to the inclusion of such skills in the Companion Volume and would also have enhanced the concept of mediation» (2023: 261).

In contrast, Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence identified 'critical cultural awareness' as an essential dimension, which is not adequately developed in the Companion Volume. Furthermore, although the Companion Volume's approach to these concepts is innovative in some respects, it does not fully stress their importance by integrating identity and socio-political awareness into its descriptors. Schneider (2020) criticises this gap, arguing that the CEFR's reliance on measurable behaviours fails to capture the deeper cognitive and affective dimensions of communication in intercultural settings. The findings of the present study support such critiques: while the Companion Volume introduces new descriptors for interaction and mediation, and plurilingual and pluricultural competence, these are, however, largely centred on pragmatic and transactional aspects of communication. This focus, with limited reference to the identity-related and reflective dimensions of intercultural engagement (Schneider 2020), may reduce the potential of the framework to support language learners in developing a more holistic, critically engaged intercultural competence.

A closer analysis of descriptors in the chapter on 'Mediation' (Council of Europe 2020a: 90-122) further highlights this limitation. In the present study, descriptors found in the 'Mediation' chapter were coded using categories that are related to the

capacity of being an ‘Intercultural mediator’ (11 occurrences, cf. Tab. 1) and of developing ‘Cultural sensitivity’ (7 occurrences) and ‘Identify conventions’ (7 occurrences). However, these descriptors rarely underline the need for critical engagement with cultural references, context-dependent adaptation, or the negotiation of identities.

While the CEFR and its Companion Volume have progressively broadened the concept of mediation (North/Piccardo 2016) – from concept mediation rooted in Translation Studies to more complex forms such as social, cultural, and communicative mediation (Corbett 2021) – this conceptual expansion is only partially reflected in the descriptors themselves. The original CEFR (Council of Europe 2001) explicitly positioned intercultural language education as fostering the learner’s identity through the enriching experience of otherness (Byram/Parmenter 2012). Moreover, the Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020a) redefines mediation with reference to sociocultural theory and the theory of affordances (Piccardo/North 2019). Nevertheless, the way in which mediation is operationalised in the descriptors remains predominantly neutral, often abstracted from the socio-political and power dynamics that can occur in intercultural settings. For example (cf. Tab. 2), descriptors for ‘mediating communication’ state that (emphasis added):

B2	Can exploit knowledge of <i>sociocultural conventions</i> in order to establish a <i>consensus</i> on how to proceed in a particular situation that is unfamiliar to everyone involved. Can, in intercultural encounters, demonstrate appreciation of perspectives other than that of their own worldview, and express themselves in a way appropriate to the context. Can <i>clarify misunderstandings and misinterpretations</i> during intercultural encounters, suggesting how things were actually meant in order to clear the air and move the discussion forward.
	Can encourage a <i>shared communication culture</i> by expressing understanding and <i>appreciation of different ideas</i>, feelings and viewpoints, and inviting participants to contribute and react to each other’s ideas. Can work collaboratively with people who have <i>different cultural orientations</i>, discussing similarities and differences in views and perspectives. Can, when collaborating with people from other cultures, <i>adapt</i> the way they work in order to create shared procedures.

Tab. 2. Descriptors for ‘Facilitating pluricultural space’ (Council of Europe 2020a: 115).

While some of these descriptors acknowledge sociocultural awareness, and others promote openness, adaptability, and communicative cooperation, they often remain framed in neutral, decontextualised terms, without explicitly addressing the power asymmetries, identity tensions, or socio-political dynamics that may shape intercultural communication. For instance, while learners are encouraged to ‘appreciate different perspectives’, they are not guided toward critical interrogation of those

perspectives, nor prompted to reflect on how their cultural identities influence interaction and how roles and conventions are negotiated or challenged in real-world interaction. As such, learners are not systematically prompted to examine their own linguistic and cultural repertoires critically, nor to reflect on how issues of identity, inclusion, or exclusion shape communication. To address this, language education could integrate more reflective, identity-oriented tasks that guide learners to analyse and articulate their experiences across languages and cultures (Beacco *et. al.* 2016), helping them to actively ‘forge’ their identities in intercultural contexts (Byram 2006).

The findings from the present study reinforce Schneider’s (2020) critique of intercultural communication in the CEFR CV. The frequency of interaction-related descriptors, such as ‘Negotiation’ (10 occurrences) and ‘Feelings and perspectives’ (8 occurrences), suggests that the framework does acknowledge interpersonal dynamics. However, the CEFR CV’s focus seems to remain largely on communicative effectiveness rather than on fostering deeper cultural understanding. This supports Schneider’s (2020) argument that while the CEFR CV recognises the importance of intercultural competence, it does not go far enough in embedding it within language learning and assessment criteria. According to Schneider: «Throughout the document authors do not refer to intercultural competence or ICC [Intercultural Communicative Competence], but to plurilingual and pluricultural competence.» (2020: 196). However, even though plurilingualism and pluriculturalism are recognised, the descriptors in the chapter on ‘Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence’ (Council of Europe 2020a: 123-128) primarily promote an additive approach rather than a fully integrated practice. This contrasts with current translanguaging perspectives, which emphasise fluid language use and the strategic deployment of multiple linguistic resources in communication (García/Otheguy 2019). The implications of these findings suggest that future revisions of the CEFR CV should include a more dynamic, identity-aware model of language learning, one that is more in line with recent research on intercultural, pluricultural and plurilingual education (Baker 2015; Runnells 2021).

As Schneider (2020) argues, the Companion Volume’s emphasis on observable, measurable behaviours may overlook the internal, identity-related dimensions of intercultural communication. This critique is particularly relevant in light of Byram’s (1997) concept of critical cultural awareness, which remains insufficiently reflected in the Companion Volume’s descriptors for mediation and intercultural competence. By reinforcing the link between theoretical frameworks, empirical analysis, and pedagogical reflection, this study contributes to current discussions on the role of language frameworks in shaping educational practice. The findings highlight the need to move beyond functional descriptors and towards a more comprehensive understanding of how identity, culture, and power intersect in language learning. In the future, educators and practitioners – particularly those working in university language centres – can consider these insights when designing training programmes, mate-

rials and assessment tools to create more inclusive approaches to language teaching that foster not only communicative effectiveness, but also intercultural reflection and personal engagement with multilingual realities.

Based on the results of the thematic analysis, University Language Centres (ULCs) can support the development of learners' plurilingual and pluricultural identities by creating structured opportunities for critical reflection on their linguistic and cultural repertoires. This can be achieved through activities such as language portfolios, workshops on intercultural awareness, and reflective journals, which can encourage learners to explore their identities and develop a deeper understanding of their cultural backgrounds (Runnels 2021). To complement the limited treatment of identity and intercultural reflection in the CEFR Companion Volume, the following frameworks and tools are recommended for integration into ULC practices to promote students' intercultural awareness and plurilingual identity:

- FREPA (Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches), which provides detailed descriptors and pedagogical resources for developing both cultural and linguistic awareness (Candelier *et. al.* 2012). ULCs can draw on FREPA to extend CEFR-based curricula by embedding identity-focused activities, encouraging learners to reflect critically on how their languages and cultures shape their perspectives and communication styles.
- The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC), which promotes values like autonomy and critical thinking (Council of Europe 2020b). Language centres can integrate RFCDC elements to support students in developing self-expression, active citizenship, and identity negotiation skills – areas that remain underrepresented in the CEFR CV descriptors.
- Quality and Equity in Education: A Practical Guide to the Council of Europe Vision of Education for Plurilingual, Intercultural and Democratic Citizenship (Byram *et. al.* 2023), which advocates for the need to embed intercultural competence within the broader goals of democratic and inclusive education. For ULCs, this implies designing courses that not only promote linguistic proficiency but also engage learners with socio-political dimensions of language, fostering a deeper understanding of cultural diversity, social justice, and global citizenship.

These frameworks also support Byram's (2023) call for a more nuanced understanding of identity, providing practical pathways to connect the CEFR CV's theoretical goals with classroom realities. By addressing these gaps, educators and practitioners can better align language learning practices with the realities of global, plurilingual and pluricultural education, equipping learners with the skills to negotiate and affirm their identities in diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes. Future research should continue to explore how these practices can be implemented to help develop the set of competencies required in an increasingly globalised world.

5. CONCLUSION

While the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020a) remains a central reference for language education in Europe, the conceptualisation of identity in its descriptors remains largely implicit. Thematic analysis of descriptors related to intercultural competence (IC) has identified a series of features that seem to be mainly focused on effective communication and collaborative strategies, rather than on fostering learners' personal and cultural identities (Byram 2006). The analysis (cf. Fig. 1) shows a strong presence of IC-related elements in mediation and interaction skills, which can be linked to theoretical perspectives on the importance of collaboration and adaptability in intercultural communication (Baker 2015). However, the low number of frequencies for some of the features found (cf. Tab. 1), and the lack of features related to critical cultural awareness and intercultural development, seem to reinforce the need for an integration of these concepts across the language skills and the pluricultural and plurilingual competence presented in the CEFR CV (Schneider 2020). Indeed, the CEFR Companion Volume provides a valuable framework for promoting plurilingual and pluricultural education, but it falls short in addressing the complexities of identity and intercultural competence. Byram's (2023) critique highlights the need for a more explicit conceptualisation of identity that integrates learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. To bridge this gap, university language centres can integrate the use of the CEFR CV with other frameworks, such as those suggested in the discussion. By promoting reflective practices and creating opportunities for students to express themselves, these centres can encourage students to actively engage in multilingual environments where they develop their pluricultural and plurilingual identities and increase their intercultural awareness.

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