

What's Love Got to Do with It? Motivating Intercultural Competency and Language Learning through Discussions of Intercultural Romantic Love Relationships

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Abstract

While English is mandatory in Japanese junior and senior high schools, Japanese university students' communicative language competency is generally very poor. Many blame this on the Japanese entrance exam system, which overemphasizes grammar rather than communicative competency.

To counterbalance this, many Japanese universities have started creating *language cafés* and *language lounges* where students can interact informally in a naturalistic setting with native English speakers and speakers of other languages (e.g., Kawamura, 2008; Nanzan University, n.d.; Sasaki, 2009; Yokkaichi University, n.d.). As students are not required to attend these cafés and lounges, organizers need to plan interesting programs, activities, or otherwise motivate students to attend (Kurokawa, Yoshida, Lewis, Igarashi & Kuradate, 2013).

Studies (e.g., Fisher, 2009; Hatfield & Rapson, 2016) have found that romantic love is a strong motivator, which increases the desire to learn a foreign language for young Japanese students (Pillar & Takahashi, 2006; Pillar, 2009). We capitalized on this at our Language Café by using romantic love as the topic of conversation. As students experienced *cultural bumps* (Archer, 1986), these would lead to intense discussions of love, cross-cultural conundrums, and issues these learners faced when dating.

This article is based on a participant–observer account of how intercultural love relationships served as a motivator for students to learn language, and how discussions about these relationships in the lounge not only helped improve their language skills but also enhanced their intercultural competency.

Keywords: motivation, second language competency, intercultural competency, intercultural romantic love, language café

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Introduction

For many Japanese university students, conversing in English or other foreign languages remains a difficult and arduous task. To this end, many institutions are creating on-campus language cafés or lounges staffed with native English speakers and speakers of other languages to provide students with opportunities for extracurricular foreign language communicative practice (e.g., Kawamura, 2008; Nanzan University, n.d.; Sasaki, 2009; Yokkaichi University, n.d.). As most of these initiatives are not for credit, coordinators must find ways to enhance student motivation to attend and participate in these extracurricular offerings (Kurokawa, et al., 2013). Creating interesting programs and activities is, therefore, vital to the success of these initiatives. This paper will begin by introducing a university language café program. Next, it will review the literature on romantic love across cultures. Finally, it will provide learner examples of how ICRLRs influenced second language learning for the participants at the lounge.

The Language Café 2012-2016

Established in April of 2012 at the Aichi University Toyohashi campus language laboratory, the language café (LC) was initially envisioned as a casual space for conversing in foreign languages in an informal setting. To mimic a café ambience, a self-serve beverage area, comfortable seating options, and other amenities were provided. Three principle languages—English, French, and Chinese Mandarin—had scheduled space and times at the LC. These scheduled times were known as the English Café, Café Français, and 中國語 café (Chinese café) periods.

Full-time instructors (native speakers of those languages) regularly attended the LC and a schedule ensured that during the designated time at least one native speaker of that language was present at the LC. Instructors received a small stipend for attending as scheduled, but often attended more frequently than required as the LC became an interesting, informal place to gather on campus and enjoy conversing with others. Other languages such as German, Portuguese, Korean, and Taiwanese were occasionally spoken impromptu at the LC.

Located on the ground floor of a central building, and with a colourfully lit sign announcing “café,” the space was open to all students on campus including regular Aichi University undergraduate students, junior college students, and adult learners attending open campus lectures. There were very few international students and immigrant students on the Toyohashi campus, but from time-to-time such a student would appear at the LC. The main “international” intercultural contact at the LC overwhelmingly remained between Japanese students and the foreign national instructors.

Language Café Discussion Groups

Upon entering the LC, students could choose where they wanted to sit and join any existing conversation or form new conversation partners/groups. Topics of

conversation varied greatly from day to day and were also influenced by the approach of the instructor scheduled to attend the LC. Some instructors preferred to have structured discussions and provided a conversation menu from which topics could be selected and discussed. Some brought in materials that they considered to be interesting for learners, while others took different approaches with discussions of current issues or employed completely laissez-faire approaches to topics leaving it entirely to the LC participants.

Discourse at the LC was wide-ranging and often students found a particular topic, group, or professor they preferred and returned to continue discussions in following LC sessions. One discussion topic that had been a constant in the English café for a particular group of students and myself was *dating and love*, that evolved into *love across cultures*, or more specifically *intercultural romantic love relationships* (ICRLR). To frame this discussion, we first need to establish what romantic love is.

Literature Review

Romantic Love

Many concepts of love with numerous variations between cultures and individuals have been put forth, thus *love* or *romantic love* as it applies to this study must first be described and defined. According to philosopher Grayling (2001), the ancient Greeks had a plethora of ways to label love's manifestations, and psychologist Lee (1973) has often been credited with synthesizing the numerous forms of love known to ancient Greeks into six basic types, including three primary types: Eros, Ludus, and Storge, and three combination types: Pragma, Mania, and Agape (Hatfield, Benson, & Rapson, 2012). Pines (2005) suggested that of the six types, it was in Eros where the roots of romantic love could be found. Lee (1973) noted Eros represented feelings of passion with features of strong physical desires and intense emotions, agreeing with what Tennov (1979) described in the early stages of romantic love. Ries, Aron, Clark, and Finkel (2013) believed the study of romantic love mostly remained in the domain of philosophers, artists, and poets until the 1980s when new taxonomies and theories were developed from the discipline of relationship science. Hatfield, Benson, and Rapson (2012) noted during the 1980s that scholars began to look more deeply at the nature of love rather than trying to understand romantic love in sociological terms as a prelude to marriage. Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) devised a *Love Attitudes Scale* and Hatfield and Sprecher (1986) created the *Passionate Love Scale*, each with their own taxonomies or styles of love. Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love proposed love was comprised of three basic components—intimacy, passion, and commitment—which also offered a classification of *consummate love* to describe this form of love (Sternberg, 1988).

Although there have been several theoretical models of love, Kline, Horton, and Zhang (2008) found most researchers across the social science disciplines agreed on two basic distinct types of love: *passionate love* also commonly referred to as *romantic love*, marked by intense emotions and physical yearning, and what is called *compassionate love*, *comfort love*, or *attachment love* marked by a sense of choice,

obligation, and commitment (Bartels & Zeki, 2004; Fisher, 2004; Gottman, 2011; Hatfield & Rapson 2005; Jankowiak, 2008; Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006; Landis & O'Shea, 2000; Liebowitz, 1983; Reis, Aron, Clark, & Finkel, 2013; Schmitt, 2004; Shelling & Fraser-Smith, 2008; Sprecher & Regan, 1998). Berscheid and Hatfield are two scholars within the field of relationship science who have been credited with creating this basic distinction between passionate and compassionate love that Reis et al. (2013) have viewed as having “dramatically enhanced the clarity with which romantic love is studied and understood” (p. 562).

Romantic love has been seen as being an authentic, intense, pure, deeply moving experience (Jankowiak, 2008) that spans the human lifetime occurring at any stage (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006) and can take a variety of forms (Fisher, 2004). According to Swindler (2001) “romantic love may enshrine sudden passion, a gradually growing inner certainty, or careful weighing of pros and cons as ways to know whether a relationship is worthy of commitment” (p. 202). Lee (1973) and later Hendrick and Hendrick (2006) saw it as having different “styles” primarily because styles can be seen as having the properties of interaction, interchangeability, and multiplicity. Hendrick and Hendrick (2006) further proclaimed love styles as “a better label than ‘ideologies’” and defined it as “attitude/belief systems that include a variable emotional core, and possibly some linkage to personality traits” (p.150). Pines (2005) found that several theories of romantic love suggested it was a process comprised of distinct stages or clearly recognizable phases. Some have viewed romantic love more whimsically, perhaps as an overpowering spirit that is ignited mysteriously (Tennov, 1979). Others such as Fisher (2004) saw romantic love in the maps of chemical pathways and neural programming that drive it, a “primordial mating force” (p. 219).

Defining exactly what romantic love is, especially in a modern context, has been tricky. For simplicity, I will adopt Hatfield, Bensman, and Rapson’s (2012) definition of passionate love as “a state of intense longing for union with another” (p. 144) with the understanding that romantic love also combines a longing for emotional and physical intimacy as well as passion (Sternberg, 1988, 1986) with a cognitive choice to enter into and continue the relationship.

According to the accepted literature, some of romantic love’s common traits include heightened emotional and physical attraction, the idealization of one’s beloved and the relationship, obsession, intensity, infatuation, hope, ecstasy, increased energy, anxiety, and despair in separation. Further, it includes a feeling of uniqueness and the beliefs in one true love, love at first sight, true love lasting forever, and that love can triumph over great obstacles (Buss, 2006; Dicks, 1995; Fisher, 2004, 2009; Hatfield & Rapson, 2005; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986, 2006; Pines, 2005; Sprecher, Aron, Hatfield, Cortese, Potapova, & Levitskaya, 1994; Swindler, 2001; Tennov, 1979).

Chemically and biologically, romantic love is associated with the increased production and levels of dopamine, oxytocin, vasopressin, testosterone, norepinephrine, adrenaline, and serotonin in the body, particularly the brain (Fisher, 2004; Fisher et al., 2005; Hatfield & Rapson, 2005; Jankowiak, 2008; Schmitt, 2006;

Sprecher & Regan, 1998). Fisher (2004) and Fisher, Aron, and Brown (2005) have found many of these chemical substances are involved in rewards processes, with experiences of pleasure and addiction, and sexual arousal systems of the brain often acting as neurotransmitters.

Universality of Romantic Love

Fisher, Aron, and Brown (2005) conducted a study using Hatfield and Sprecher's (1986) measure of romantic love, the *Passionate Love Scale (PLS)*, in combination with modern magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) technology to map romantic love in the human brain. They found increased activity in the dopamine-rich areas of the brain thought to be associated with sex drive, reward and motivation systems, and attachment behaviors. Rather than being thought of as an emotion, Fisher, Aron, and Brown suggested that romantic love is a motivation system that changes over time.

The findings from this study combined with evidence from several multicultural studies on romantic love led Fisher (2004) to confidently state, "romantic love is deeply embedded in the architecture and chemistry of the human brain . . . a universal human experience" (p. 3). In a study of 166 societies around the world, Jankowiak and Fischer (1993) found evidence of romantic love in 88.5%. Jankowiak (2008) later included an appendix in his publication with an extensive list of ethnographic evidence supporting the universality of romantic love. Pines (2005) acknowledged the universality of romantic love and noted that it was a social construct that is historically and culturally bound. Matsumoto and Juang (2013) also saw love as universal, and drew attention to the uniqueness of romantic love as a human emotion. The authors further pointed out that cultures value romantic love differently, sometimes vastly differently. Today, according to Hatfield et al., (2012), it is generally accepted that romantic love or passionate love is a common cultural universal.

Culture and Romantic Love

Hatfield and Rapson (2005) argued culture impacted romantic love in a number of ways such as how we viewed love, how susceptible we were to falling in love, who we loved, the course of romantic love, or attachment built in the relationship. As the result of a comprehensive study of romantic attachment in 64 different cultural areas around the globe, Schmitt et al. (2004) concluded that cultural differences in romantic love appeared in the manifestations associated with values, beliefs, and attachment patterns of romantic love. Schmitt (2006) later added that cultural experiences of romantic love varied, while Jankowiak (2008) further indicated that romantic love's universality is bound by cultural patterns of expression. It seemed the human universality of romantic love was generally accepted, as well as cultural differences in expression and influence on romantic love.

Dicks (1995), Grearson and Smith (1995), and Romano (2008) provided evidence that when people from different cultural backgrounds coupled in romantic love, it was

often the case that cultural differences did not appear immediately. According to Romano (2008):

In the early stages of all love relationships—and intercultural relationships are no exception—people are aware of and encouraged by the similarities between them. Any differences they do see are often disregarded as surface details, challenges, or aspects that make the relationship more interesting. (p. xv)

In an examination of people's attitudes towards romantic love and the value of romantic love across cultures, Hendrick and Hendrick (2006) noted that the similarities, not the differences, seemed more pronounced across cultural groups. However, Shelling and Fraser-Smith (2008) noted that in ICRLR "huge cultural differences can also exist between partners within the west [or any one nation], especially those whose ancestors or influences stem from two totally different cultures" (p. xi).

Finally, profound understanding of cultural values may prove difficult for some because it can go unnoticed like the air. Similarly, Swindler (2001) drew attention to this point noting individuals may not be fully aware of the influences of their own culture on ICRLRs because it is part of their everyday lives. One of the aims of this discussion group focusing on ICRLRs was to draw attention to one's own values and cultural influences in the relationship.

ICRLRs and Japanese Communication Styles

Alupoaipei (2009) and Romano (2008) found that communication styles and cultural communication preferences were the other major sources of difficulties in ICRLR. Hall and Hall (2002) stated, "cultural communications are deeper and more complex than spoken or written messages" (p. 165), perhaps suggesting specific attention needed to be paid to cultural context in relation to communication styles in ICRLR. Rogers, Hart, and Miike (2002) found Hall's high-context and low-context communication dichotomy "particularly useful for many Japanese scholars in explaining Japanese communication through cultural concepts" (p. 17).

Hall (1976), Bennett (1998), and Poulsen and Thomas (2011), all emphasized how low-context communication style—a direct, precise verbal approach—has been often valued by individualistic cultures; whereas high-context communication with meanings and intentions often inferred, or implicit in context, has been often valued by collectivist cultures. Ting-Toomey (2009) added that in an ICRLR when dissimilar communication approaches are employed, very different expectations and interpretations have frequently led couples to experience major communication breakdowns. Lack of sensitivity with a partner's communication approach has led to other problems including feelings of being on different levels (Romano, 2008), misjudged intentions (Shelling & Fraser-Smith, 2008), and loss of face (Ting-Toomey, 1994), with the latter found to run counter to Japanese social mores (Lewis, 1999).

Kito (2005) and Ting-Toomey (2012) remarked that in day-to-day communication, Japanese have tended to show disproportionately limited amounts of their public self in comparison to their private self, and Levine et al. (1995) noted that Japanese preferred to take a reserved approach with self-disclosure. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) also found that the Japanese guarded their inner feelings especially at the outset of a romantic love relationship, and self-disclosure came at a slower, polychronic time rhythm. Hall (1959) and Poulsen and Thomas (2011), commented that in chronemics, polychronic cultures have been generally viewed as being indirect, fluid with regards to time schedules, and have tended to be comfortable with multitasking activities; whereas monochronic cultures have seemed to be more linear, direct, and have tended to organize time sequentially with punctuality highly valued. Hall and Hall (1987) offered a strong argument that showed Japan has been interpreted to have a unique blend of being very monochronic with regards to schedules, foreigners, and technology, but quite polychronic in most other situations.

Methods

As stated in the introduction, the English Café shared a schedule time and LC space with other languages. English was scheduled Mondays through Wednesdays 12:40 pm - 1:15 pm, and 4:40 pm - 7:00 pm. It was possible to meet on other days and times, which did occur for from time to time. The participants in this study met at the LC to speak English, and shared stories of their relationships on their own volition. With the exception of myself, all participants attended the group irregularly. Throughout the history of ICRLR group discussions, the group was in flux with new participants continually entering discussions while other participants departed. At any given LC meeting, the group I met with ranged from two members (myself and a participant) to a group of ten to twelve people.

The discussions are recounted in this study from the perspective of a participant-observer and through one-one-one interviews with the two participant students who were part of the group from its inception in 2013 during the second year of the LC to December 2016.

Results and Discussion

Discussion of Love at the Language Café

Discussions of love, values, and dating behaviors quickly became a mainstay topic at my English Café group as curiosity regarding the phenomenon grew and participants returned each week. Simons et al. (1986) and Sprecher et al. (1994) found that at least for young Japanese, romantic love was valued for marital unions in a similar sense as Westerners. Lieberman and Hatfield (2006) and Ting-Toomey (2009) noted this was especially true in modern times, thus romantic love made for an engaging topic for LC participants. Talking about ICRLRs at the LC developed out of discussions on dating and love in general, and personal differences and experiences therein. For example, several early LC sessions were spent discussing and exploring the Japanese dating concept of *kokuhaku* (告白) or *love confessions* that marked the

onset of romantic love relationships. In this love confession typically one partner, usually the male, states intentions to couple through a commonly used phrase such as “好きです。付き合ってください” (I love you. Can we start seeing each other?). Regardless of whether the couple has known each other a long time or not, are friends, or have gone on group dates together, they are typically not considered an exclusive couple until the ritual love confession is performed and accepted. From a cultural perspective, it is widely understood that Japanese society has a preference for clear social markers including beginnings and endings of relationships (Ramsey, 1998). Thus, the love confession can be viewed as an extension of the cultural preference for clear boundaries even in the forming of personal relationships.

During one discussion of *kokuhaku*, students were asked to view the ritual from the perspective of an outsider whose culture did not have such a ritual. For a rare “homework” assignment, I invited the students to consider an intercultural dating scenario in which one partner is Japanese and the other partner a foreigner from that culture of which we spoke. Their assignment for the following meeting was to be prepared to describe how the Japanese person would know if they were in a committed romantic relationship when there was no explicit *kokuhaku*-style statement. Once the group dispersed, Yuri, a 20-year-old female student privately confided in me that she was going through that identical circumstance herself with her American friend whom she had known for four months and was not sure if he was her boyfriend or not. The ensuing conversation went something like this:

Instructor: Does he call or text you every day?

Yuri: Yes, always. All the time.

Instructor: Do you see him often?

Yuri: Every weekend we go out somewhere together or with friends.

Instructor; Is seeing him every weekend implied? I mean, do you expect to see him every weekend?

Yuri: Yes.

Instructor; Have you held hands or kissed?

Yuri: (timidly) Yes.

Instructor: Congratulations! You have a boyfriend!

In this case, Yuri appeared so bound by her cultural expectations and norms regarding dating, she had completely overlooked the numerous other indicators of an emerging romantic love relationship.

Discovering ICRLRs

As it happened, there were quite a few students who attended the initial group discussions, and some who later attended subsequent meetings, that confessed to being in various stages of ICRLRs. These students were all Japanese females and all had white male partners from North America, Europe, and Oceania. The native language of the male partners was predominantly English, but there were also two French speakers and one German speaker. The students met their partners either in Japan or while studying abroad.

Piller and Takahashi noted on numerous occasions that the desire to learn English is intertwined with the desire for romance for many Japanese female English second language learners (Piller & Takahashi, 2006; Piller, 2009; Takahashi, 2010).

ICRLRs and Cultural Patterns

Much of the discussion regarding ICRLRs in the English Café group came about through participants describing cultural bumps (Archer, 1986) in their relationships. “A cultural bump occurs when an individual from one culture finds himself or herself in a different, strange, or uncomfortable situation when interacting with persons of a different culture” (pp. 170-171). For example, on several occasions a few of the students would express their annoyance with their Western male partner’s inability to make clear decisions in the relationship. The students reported feeling awkward, impatient, perturbed, resentful, and confused by the behavior. In the group discussion, I drew their attention to the possibility that these feelings may reflect their own cultural expectations and reactions; not simply that their partners were being especially “strange” or “irritating.”

Japanese appear to have a preference for hierarchical relationships, particularly in cross-gender relationships (Rule, Freeman, & Ambalady, 2013; West, 2011; Bystydzienski, 2011, Hofstede, 1995, 1991; Salamon, 1986). Given this, it is possible that these female Japanese students were experiencing reactions to the Japanese cultural norm in which males hold and exercise the majority of power in male-female relationships. In other words, these young ladies were consciously or unconsciously hoping their intercultural partner would follow familiar cultural patterns. On the other hand, the western males for their part may have been acting from their own cultural normative practices.

Participant Reflections on the ICRLR

Tomoko and Emi (25, 22, pseudonyms used), both in ICRLRs, both original members that participated for the full four-year duration spoke of their experiences in ICRLRs, language learning, culture, and the LC discussion group.

Emi met her boyfriend while studying abroad for a year in France. It was her first ICRLR and first boyfriend. Emi explained how she met her partner:

In France, there is the Association of Franco-Japonais. So, one Japanese held something like LC with French people and Japanese students... we met there.

Interviewer: When you were in Japan, and before leaving, were you thinking you could catch a boyfriend?

Emi: A little bit (laughs).

Tomoko had two ICRLR experiences. In discussing her previous ICRLR with a French boyfriend, Tomoko had this to say...

I wanted to major in law, not the languages. I wasn't interested in English at all, by that time. But after I met him...I wanted to communicate more with him. So, I had two choices, to learn English or to learn French. Back then it was too hard to learn French that is why I chose English and also that decision still influenced me when I chose a major, when I entered this university. So of course, through studying for the entrance exam I thought... English may be good for me to study because my private teacher taught me English very well. He was a really good teacher that's why I thought I could study in English. But that was 50% of the reason to major in English, but the other [sic] half was that actually I wanted to meet him (French boyfriend) and communicate with him more. That's why I chose...

Interviewer: So, you had some romantic feeling towards him?

Tomoko: Yes. And also as a second language I chose French. My parents recommended me to learn German but I still had feelings that's why I chose French.

Speaking of the connection between language, culture, and romantic love, Tomoko went on to say...

Through some relationship with some foreign guy I just found, really that language is just a tool to communicate with them. So studying... (long pause)... yeah anyway everything is connected. And also, just simply because... Learning languages is very suitable for me. Since I started to learn French I thought maybe I'm good at learning many languages. That is why I've tried learning ancient Greek and Hebrew, but I didn't get an ancient Greek boyfriend or a Hebrew boyfriend.

It can be seen that the mere prospect of a romantic relationship with a foreigner was enough to strongly motivate Tomoko, at least initially, in her foreign language study. It also appeared to be a stronger influence than her family. It begs to question how her family would support the ICRLR should such a relationship flourish. Kline et al. (2008), Levine et al. (2008), Brown Diggs (2001), Dion and Dion (1993), Simons et al. (1986), and Nakamura (1985) all agreed that often romantic love as a personal choice traditionally met kinship disapproval in collectivist cultures such as Japan due to its 'uncontrollable' nature. With regards to most collectivist cultures, Ting-Toomey (2009) declared "passionate love is treasured where kinship ties are weak" and "diluted where kinship ties are strong" (p. 38) as relationships based on compassionate love are often viewed by collectivist kin as offering stability, longevity, and a more supportive environment for the extended family structure. Furthermore, in interracial romantic relationships Orbe and Orbe (2008) suggested that where there is strong family and social group influences, those groups have historically acted as a social force that strategically attempted to prevent interracial unions in order to preserve the homogeneity of the group.

Participant Reflections on the LC Discussion Group Experience

Often the discussion group drew participants who had only been in intracultural relationships but were interested in the intercultural romantic love experience, and some curious individuals without any prior romantic relationship experience. Even though having new student participants show interest and join in the group discussions, it was not easy for some participants due to English language ability or lack of experience. Tomoko confessed:

Actually, I've never dated with a Japanese guy, that is why sometimes I feel uncomfortable to talk about love relationships with people who have only had a relationship with Japanese. There is a big gap... They don't have never enough experience to be in love. Even university students, some of them have never been in love with anyone. So it is kind of difficult to find a common topic on love relationships.

Talking about such kind of topic in English is hard for them, but in Japanese they talk about such kind of things a lot, especially at an izakaiya [Japanese pub] or somewhere. So personally, I think they really have interest in that kind of topic or they hesitate talk about it or they cannot find any chance.

Emi agreed and felt limited by her own English skills but still felt listening to group discussions was interesting and beneficial for her.

Instructor Reflections on Participant Language

Seven foreign language instructors (one female, six male) were interviewed regarding the ICRLR group participants. All instructors noted considerable language progress in the areas of vocabulary acquisition, communicative fluency, as well as speaker self-confidence. One French language instructor (French male, 46) spoke of Emi's current state of second language communicative ability as "much improved," that "the fact that she has this relationship with this guy has definitely boosted her confidence to speak. Definitely in my opinion, most definitely." Another English instructor (British, male, 42) spoke of improvements with three of the students stating, "last year all these girls were *B* level students at best, this year they are all *As* and are really motivated." The female instructor (Trinidadian, 39) added that the students in the ICRLR group "spent far more time at the LC than others."

Precautionary Measures

Discussing ICRLRs in a university context can be tricky. From the instructor's perspective, one must be aware of potential dangers such as appropriateness of discussions, and comments that may be construed in wrong ways. It is also important to be fully aware of and frame discussions under university guidelines and within policies. Creating an environment that all members feel safe to share thoughts openly and without fear of judgment, persecution, or harassment is vital for this type of format and discussions or romantic love relationships. Female staff members of the

university language laboratory recorded participation in the LC and also joined in group conversations, but on rare occasions. At least one of the three staff members present is always physically in the room during the LC, and within earshot of every conversation group. Two of the LC staff were interviewed regarding the ICRLR discussions at the LC and from their perspective the discussions of ICRLRs never seen as inappropriate. In fact, one staff member admitted to often listening in on ICRLR discussions in particular because “everybody was having fun speaking, and talking about love was so interesting.”

Conclusion

Overall, it appeared that romantic love served as a motivator for these students to study a new language and culture. Being in a romantic relationship also provided them with real cross-cultural dilemmas to overcome. Discussions in the LC provided these students as well as those who were part of the discussion group the opportunity to objectively analyze these cultural bumps so that they could learn about culture and cultural differences. In addition, discussing love, which is so central to the lives of many young adults in a foreign language, helped improve their foreign language skills. In sum, it can be said that intercultural love can serve as an effective teaching tool in a language café not only because it is a topic that will draw many students but also because it provides real case studies of culture clashes that can serve as learning opportunities. While I have demonstrated some of the potential benefits of ICRLRs in language learning and intercultural competency development (Bennett & Bennett, 2004), further investigation into the effects of motivation in second language development, identity, and intercultural competency with regards to ICRLRs is necessary.

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