Although I am the sole author of this monograph and take responsibility for what it says, it owes much to its origins in a particular project and to the people involved. I am above all grateful to Geneviève Zarate, with whom I have enjoyed the privilege of cooperation and joint authorship for several years. She may not agree with all that I say but her ideas have profoundly influenced this text.

In 1989 in *Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education*, I wrote that one of the areas crucially in need of further research was the assessment of the cultural dimension in language learning. I was therefore very pleased to be invited to participate in the Council of Europe’s project to develop a ‘Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning and Teaching’. The Framework was to be based on definitions of levels of proficiency in the use of languages, and Geneviève Zarate and I were invited to write a paper to clarify the issues involved in determining levels of ‘socio-cultural competence’.

The paper, ‘Definitions, objectives and assessment of socio-cultural competence’ was written to a tight schedule. This had the advantage of obliging us to formulate our thinking quickly and clearly, and the disadvantage of allowing little time for reflection, revision or elaboration. It also meant that the formulation was related to a particular model of language learning and to other position papers in the project.

It is possible that without the stimulus of the Council of Europe project, we would not have put pen to paper or hand to computer, being too wary of the complexities of the issues. For me, it served as a significant first step, whose direction was determined by writing together with Geneviève Zarate. Research Fellowships in Durham and Washington, DC provided the second stimulus and the intellectual and physical space in which to pursue the ideas of our original paper. This time the purpose and the readership is different. My hope is that this monograph will be accessible to anyone interested in foreign language teaching and learning, whatever the context in which they live and work. I realise that I am setting myself a difficult task because language teaching and learning are social phenomena differing according to time and place. Assessment in particular is linked to societal demands, to ensure quality of education, to plan for national needs, to facilitate mobility, and so on. To say anything useful
for every context is difficult but important, partly for reasons internal to the field, and partly because national concerns are now being complemented by international ones.

I referred above to the different origins and contexts in which this monograph has been produced. At the Council of Europe, I am particularly grateful to Antonietta de Vigili, Joe Shiels and John Trim.

At the National Foreign Language Center, I was very fortunate in being in residence with Ross Steele and Myriam Met, who were generous with their time in reading my long-hand script, and stimulating in discussion of my ill-formed first drafts. It was also a novel and rewarding experience, in my first visit to the United States, to be coping with new cultural practices, a whole range of cultures, and attempting to communicate in a language in which I was a proficient foreigner, while at the same time retiring to the haven of my office to write about the ‘intercultural speaker’. Theory and practice were one.

I am grateful to the University of Durham for the award of a Sir Derman Christophersen Research Fellowship, and to the National Foreign Language Center at the Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC for the award of an Andrew Mellon Fellowship. It was a pleasure to be a colleague of David Maxwell, his staff and other visiting Fellows – particularly my neighbours Mats Oscarrson and Stephen Straight – for three months.

I would also like to acknowledge the helpful comments on a draft of the manuscript by an anonymous reviewer who provided encouragement and detailed suggestions for improvements.

I am grateful to Susan Metcalfe who patiently and efficiently typed my first draft, written still with paper and pencil, I have to confess.

As always, my wife, Marie Thérèse, allowed me the luxury of quiet essential for writing, and put up with my absences while my attention was elsewhere. My best, and best-loved examples of ‘intercultural speakers’ are our children Alice and Ian, who are an inspiration.

Michael Byram
Durham
January 1997