

FORMATION OF THE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF STUDENTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

The article highlights developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching, involving recognising that the aims are: to give learners intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence; to prepare them for interaction with people of other cultures; to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values and behaviours; and to help them to see that such interaction is an enriching experience. Thus, the visit or exchange is much more than an opportunity to 'practice' the language learnt in the classroom. It is a holistic learning experience which provides the means of using intercultural skills and acquiring new attitudes and values. Teachers need clear objectives, methods which take into account the power of experiential learning, and then learners will 'make the strange familiar - and the familiar strange'.

Key words: intercultural dimension, Intercultural communicative competence, language teaching, interaction, cultures.

INTRODUCTION

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In the past few decades, the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) began to address linguistic and cultural diversity, rather than focusing on teaching aspects related only to the English language. Knowing how to use a language reflects knowing how to use it appropriately in

different social contexts. Since then, the concept of communicative competence has gained significant attention and has been reconceptualized over the years.

The purpose of the article is to study the role of culture in communicative competence, consider and present one of the most influential model of intercultural competence that can be used in foreign language learning process.

METHODOLOGY

Although the field of linguistics is relatively new, it has witnessed several attempts to conceptualize what it means to communicate effectively in a given language. In its early years, with generative linguistics, the concept of competence was theorized as the knowledge of language items (e.g., grammar, phonology, morphology, etc.) that refers to what one knows about language, regarding the 'native-speaker (Byram, Michael, Gribkova, Bella, & Starkey, Hugh., 2002). But scientist's reactions to this theory began to burgeon from anthropology to redefine the concept of competence and arguing that social factors play a key role in communication (Canale, Michael, 1983). Since then, any discussion of communicative competence in recent years recognizes the importance of the use of the language in social contexts, also referred to as pragmatics.

DISCUSSION

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has been highly recommended by the Council of Europe's (2001) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages , one important document used worldwide the integration of cultural dimensions in language teaching (ACTFL, 2006). Intercultural communication is communication on the basis of respect for individuals and equality of human rights as the democratic basis for social interaction. It defines that one main goal of interculturality is to help language learners to interact with speakers of other languages on equal terms. In essence, when language learners develop intercultural awareness, they can convey information effectively and also develop a human relationship with people of other languages and cultures (Alptekin, Cem., 2002). So language teaching with an intercultural dimension continues to help learners to acquire the linguistic competence needed to communicate in speaking or writing, to formulate what they want to say/write in correct and appropriate ways. But it also develops their intercultural competence i.e. their ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality.

Social identities are related to cultures. Someone who is 'Chinese' will have acquired that identity through being brought up surrounded by other Chinese, unconsciously learning their beliefs, values and behaviours. Similarly someone whose social identities include being 'a teacher' will have acquired the knowledge, values and behaviours they share with other teachers through a process of socialisation. But

to see only one identity in a person is a simplification. An intercultural speaker is aware of this simplification, knows something about the beliefs, values and behaviours which are 'Chinese', but is also aware that there are other identities hidden in the person with whom they are interacting, even if they do not know what the associated beliefs, values and behaviours are. Therefore an intercultural speaker needs some knowledge, about what it means to be Chinese or a teacher or indeed a Chinese teacher, for example. Moreover, an intercultural speaker also needs an awareness that there is more to be known and understood from the other person's perspective, that there are skills, attitudes and values involved too (see following section), which are crucial to understanding intercultural human relationships. As a consequence, the 'best' teacher is neither the native nor the non-native speaker, but the person who can help learners see relationships between their own and other cultures, can help them acquire interest in and curiosity about 'otherness', and an awareness of themselves and their own cultures seen from other people's perspectives (Byram, Michael, 1991).

This implies that cultural concepts, must be learned in English classrooms, need to be treated with caution as the spread of the English language around the world implies that many non-native speakers of English use the language to communicate with other non-native speakers (Canale, Michael, 1983). That is, learning about American or British cultural aspects could reduce the possibilities of acknowledging other less dominant cultural groups. On the other hand, considering one of the functions of the use of English is to facilitate communication among speakers from different cultures and languages, exploring cultures that are not related to the English language is another goal of ICC (Alptekin, Cem. 2002).

The main aim of teaching the intercultural dimension is not the transmission of information about a foreign country.

The intercultural dimension is concerned with :

- helping learners to understand how intercultural interaction takes place;
- how social identities are part of all interaction;
- how their perceptions of other people and others people's perceptions of them influence the success of communication;
- how they can find out for themselves more about the people with whom they are communicating.

A teacher does not have to know everything about 'the target culture'. This is in any case impossible and in fact there are many cultures associated with a particular language, for example many countries where French is spoken as the first language, and within those countries many variations on beliefs, values and behaviours which people share, in other words many cultures.

The teacher should try to design a series of activities to enable learners to discuss and draw conclusions from their own experience of the target culture solely as a result of what they have heard or read.

The methods of doing this can include simulations and role-play which will activate their schemata and background knowledge about other countries and cultures: learners act the role of visitors to their own country and meet with other learners acting as themselves and not as the stereotypes that the visitors are expecting. This kind of experiential learning is powerful in developing self-awareness as well as perceptions of other countries. The teacher can encourage learners to become more observant in terms of various subtleties of cultural behaviour. Learners are sure to emerge out of these experiences much better prepared to communicate with other intercultural speakers, tolerate the differences and handle everyday situations they are likely to encounter in a foreign country.

There is in this kind of work no need for the teacher to be an expert about other countries. The focus is on how learners respond to others and others' views of themselves, and how they interact with people from other cultures.

What is more important than native speaker knowledge is an ability to analyse and specific training in systemic cultural analysis is an important aid in becoming a foreign language teacher, regardless of the teacher's mother-tongue. This is not to deny the importance of linguistic competence and it may be important to follow the authority of the native speaker in linguistic competence, but intercultural competence is a quite different matter (Byram, Michael, 1991).

Analyses of cultures, particularly in English language classrooms, must include an in-depth reflection on attitudes from encounters with people from other cultures, without placing more or less value within a particular culture; in fact, this reflection must include positive experiences and benefits that can be drawn from these encounters (Brown, H. Douglas, 2014).

The one of the most influential and widely cited ICC models that guide language teachers to integrate interculturality in the classroom, that includes five subsets of knowledges:

1. Attitudes relativizing self, valuing other ;
2. Education: political education, critical cultural awareness;
3. Skills: discover and/or interact;
4. Knowledge of self and other; of interaction: individual and societal ;
5. Skills interpret and relate (Byram, Michael, 1991).

Learners can be trained in simple or complex skills, depending on their maturity and language skills, with which they can investigate the environment, look for what is unfamiliar and for explanations which help them to understand. The explanations may come from analysis of documents or from

interviewing, formally or informally, those who live in that environment. This is also the opportunity for cooperation with teachers of other subjects, especially geography, history, and other social and human sciences, since learners acquire skills of social investigation in those subjects too: doing surveys, analysing statistics, reading historical and contemporary texts, both factual and fictional (Byram, Michael, Gribkova, Bella, & Starkey, Hugh, 2002).

It is important to remember that there are three phases for any study visit or exchange:

- in the preparatory phase, learners need to externalise their thoughts, anxieties and excitements about their visit. For example, ask everyone in a class to stand around a very large piece of paper and write or draw the first thing that comes into their mind when they think about the place they are going to. Later they can look back at this and compare and contrast expectation and experience, but it also helps the teacher to know during this preparatory phase learners' starting point;

- in the fieldwork phase, learners are surrounded by and immersed in a new environment and learn consciously and unconsciously through all the senses. There should however be opportunity for withdrawal from the demands of being in a new environment, an opportunity for reflection alone and together with others. Learners should keep a diary as a safe metaphorical 'room' where they can express feelings and reactions. They should also be brought into a 'classroom' atmosphere with their teachers so that each individual can compare and contrast their experience and interpretation of it with that of others, and their teachers can help them with misunderstandings or other problems. This has to be done during the visit because the emotional involvement is very deep and needs to be handled immediately;

- in the follow-up phase, after return home, the emphasis should be on further reflection on individuals' experience during the visit and, by sharing and comparing, on an attempt to analyse and conceptualise what has been experienced as a basis for understanding (some aspects of) the other environment and the people who live there. One very effective way of doing this is for them to prepare a presentation of their visit - both a factual account and their reactions and interpretations - to friends and family. This obliges them to de-centre, to take the perspective of their audience and think about what they need to explain to those who do not know (Canale, Michael, 1983).

Much of this work can be done with the aid of visual representations because this removes the constraints of foreign and first language in expressing what is unfamiliar. Learners can draw, take photographs, make diagrams to capture experience and to express their feelings.

It is also important to remember that the study visit or exchange is much more than an opportunity to 'practice' the language learnt in the classroom. It is a holistic learning experience which provides the means of using intercultural skills and acquiring new attitudes and values. Language practice may be limited, especially on a visit rather than an exchange and the acquisition of knowledge about another country may be minimal, but this does not matter. Teachers need clear objectives, methods which take

into account the power of experiential learning, and then learners will 'make the strange familiar - and the familiar strange' (Byram, 1997).

CONCLUSION

So, in order to communicate in English, it's important to know how to deal with people from several linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It is also important to point out that one particular language has several varieties so viewing languages and cultures from a monolithic perspective is not accurate in a globalized world. The integration of ICC in English classes offers students an opportunity to learn about many other cultures that are not necessarily related to native speakers of English. In this sense, it is important for teachers to be mindful to include pedagogical resources that promote linguistic and cultural diversity in English, and also provide opportunities for students to express their identities.

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РЕЗЮМЕ

ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОММУНИКАТИВНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТИ СТУДЕНТОВ В ПРОЦЕССЕ ОБУЧЕНИЯ ИНОСТРАННОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

ИРИНА КОБЫЛЯНСКА, ВЛАДИМИР КАРАПЕТЯН

В статье подчеркивается развитие межкультурного измерения в преподавании языка, включая признание того, что целями являются: дать учащимся межкультурную компетентность, а также лингвистическую компетентность; подготовить их к взаимодействию с людьми других культур; дать им возможность понимать и принимать людей из других культур как личностей с другими отличительными взглядами, ценностями и поведением; и помочь им увидеть, что такое взаимодействие является обогащающим опытом. Таким образом, визит или обмен – это нечто большее, чем просто возможность «практиковать» язык, изучаемый в классе. Это целостный опыт обучения, который дает возможность использовать межкультурные навыки и приобретать новые взгляды и ценности. Учителям нужны четкие цели и методы, учитывающие силу обучения на основе опыта, и тогда учащиеся «сделают незнакомое знакомым, а знакомое странным».

Ключевые слова: межкультурное измерение, межкультурная коммуникативная компетенция, обучение языку, взаимодействие, культуры.

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

ՈՒՍԱՆՈՂՆԵՐԻ ՄԻՋՄՇԱԿՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ ՀԱՂՈՐԴԱԿՑՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՁԵՎԱՎՈՐՈՒՄՆ ՕՏԱՐ ԼԵՉՈՒՆԵՐԻ ՈՒՍՈՒՑՄԱՆ ԳՈՐԾԸՆԹԱՑՈՒՄ ԻՐԻՆԱ ԿՈԲԵԼՅԱՆՍԿԱ , ՎԼԱԴԻՄԻՐ ԿԱՐԱՊԵՏՅԱՆ

Հոդվածում կարևորվում է լեզվի ուսուցման միջմշակութային հարթության զարգացումը, որը ներառում է գիտակցել, որ նպատակներն են. պատրաստել նրանց այլ մշակույթների մարդկանց հետ շփվելու համար. հնարավորություն տալ նրանց հասկանալ և ընդունել այլ մշակույթների մարդկանց՝ որպես այլ տարբերակիչ տեսակետներ, արժեքներ և վարքագիծ ունեցող անհատներ. և օգնել նրանց տեսնել, որ նման փոխգործակցությունը հարստացնող փորձ է: Այսպիսով, այցելությունը կամ փոխանակումը շատ ավելին է, քան դասարանում սովորած լեզուն «վարժելու» հնարավորություն: Դա ամբողջական ուսուցման փորձ է, որը հնարավորություն է տալիս օգտագործել միջմշակութային հմտությունները և ձեռք բերել նոր վերաբերմունք և արժեքներ: Ուսուցիչներին պետք են հստակ նպատակներ, մեթոդներ, որոնք հաշվի կառնեն փորձառական ուսուցման ուժը, և այնուհետև սովորողները «տարօրինակը կդարձնեն ծանոթ, իսկ ծանոթը տարօրինակ»:

Բանալի բառեր՝ միջմշակութային հարթություն, միջմշակութային հաղորդակցական
իրավասություն, լեզվի ուսուցում, փոխազդեցություն, մշակույթներ:

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