



## THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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### ABSTRACT

This article devoted to theme about basic form of communication intercultural competence. Culture finds its expression in language; so, learning a new language without familiarity with its culture remains incomplete. Moreover, fostering intercultural communication competence is an important part of developing critical thinking skills, and these two are correlated in the process of language teaching.

**KEYWORDS:** - Culture, competence, intercultural competence, international role, globalization, bound people.

### INTRODUCTION

Language is a means of expression. We express our feelings, emotions, thoughts, needs, and desires in words, symbols and gestures, which are considered as language. Language can be defined as verbal, physical, biologically innate, and a basic form of communication. Culture is the characteristics of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. Thus, culture finds its expression in language; so, learning a new language without familiarity with its culture remains incomplete. Moreover, fostering intercultural communication competence is an important part of developing critical thinking skills, and these two are correlated in the process of language teaching.

Many experts have talked much about the

relationship between language and culture. According to Wei, language has a dual character: both as a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Language without culture is unthinkable, so is human culture without language. A particular language is a mirror of a particular culture.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Brown describes the relation between language and culture as follows: "A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture". In a word, culture and language are inseparable. When it comes to the realm of teaching and learning, as Gao presents it, the interdependence of language learning and cultural learning is so evident that



one can conclude that language learning is culture learning and consequently, language teaching is cultural teaching. Gao further states that foreign language teachers should be aware of the place of cultural studies in foreign language classroom and attempt to enhance students' cultural awareness and improve their communication competence. Wang, likewise, asserts, "Foreign language teaching is foreign culture teaching, and foreign language teachers are foreign culture teachers".

Preparing learners to interact appropriately and effectively while participating in intercultural relationships is a key component of foreign language curricula. The notion of critical cultural awareness, which is embedded within the framework of intercultural communicative competence, encourages language educators to craft learning opportunities that guide learners in observing clear connections between classroom lessons and real-world issues while exercising critical thinking skills throughout the process. Although research by Byram has demonstrated the importance of critical cultural awareness, few studies have illustrated how critical cultural awareness can be developed in a classroom setting while working to achieve language proficiency.

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is a framework for intercultural learning that prepares foreign language students for meaningful interactions with those from other cultures by addressing the attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed for effective intercultural communication. The literature on intercultural communicative competence focuses heavily on the notion of preparing learners to interact appropriately and effectively with people from diverse linguistic systems, backgrounds, and worldviews. In order to prepare students for intercultural interactions, teachers are encouraged to design foreign language lessons that ask students to reflect on their beliefs about

the target culture in conjunction with opportunities for students to participate in active inquiry regarding the products, practices, and perspectives of another culture. Once attitudes and knowledge have been addressed, students should participate in tasks that promote the intercultural skills needed for participation in reciprocal relationships with individuals from different cultures. Teachers can incorporate an intercultural stance into the curriculum by providing opportunities for learners to practice skills in analysis, interpretation, communication, and interaction in relation to the products and practices of the target culture.

Within the framework of intercultural communicative competence, Byram defines critical cultural awareness as "An ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries". When teachers attend to CCA as a component of intercultural learning in the foreign language classroom, learning tasks must provide opportunities for students to practice the skill of critical evaluation. In order to accomplish this task effectively, educators must consider developmentally appropriate ways of structural learning so that students learn how to evaluate the practices, products, and perspectives of the target culture. For this reason, a necessary first step in the process toward building CCA is that students must be given time to identify and reflect upon their preconceived ideas, judgments, and stereotypes toward individuals from the target culture.

The notion of communicative competence was developed within the discipline of linguistics (or more accurately, the sub discipline of sociolinguistics) and appealed to many within the language teaching profession, who argued that communicative competence, and not simply grammatical competence, should be the goal of



language teaching. The next question to be solved was, what would a syllabus that reflected the notion of communicative competence look like and what implications would it have for language teaching methodology? The result was communicative language teaching. Communicative language teaching created a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement when it first appeared as a new approach to language teaching in the 1970s and 1980s, and language teachers and teaching institutions all around the world soon began to rethink their teaching, syllabuses, and classroom materials. In planning language courses within a communicative approach, grammar was no longer the starting point.

## DISCUSSION

According to Tomalin, the international role of the English language and globalization are the two main reasons to teach culture as a fifth language skill, in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing. 'What the fifth language skill teaches you is the mindset and technique to adapt your use of English to learn about, understand and appreciate the values, ways of doing things and unique qualities of other cultures. It involves understanding how to use language to accept differences, to be flexible and tolerant of ways of doing things, which might be different to yours. It is an attitudinal change that is expressed through the use of language.

Both of language and culture have a function of communication because they both carry meanings. On the one hand, language carries syntactic, semantic and pragmatic meanings for language users to communicate. On the other hand, culture carries meanings and cultural meanings are expressed through patterns of behavior, e.g., language. In order to communicate successfully across languages and cultures, one must understand culturally different norms of

interaction and people's values and thought. Sometimes linguistic correct sentences could cause is understanding or confusion when they are in a different cultural context. The function of culture in a foreign language teaching, the term culture should perhaps be more clearly specified. Generally, it could be defined as various customs, values, typical behavior, attitudes and the overall approach regarding the way of life reflected in movies, songs, fashion, literature and numerous products of art, but also in everyday use of the particular language, e.g. recognized proverbs, common idiomatic expressions or phrases which are characteristic for certain members of society and which significantly differentiate these people according to their age, level and specific area of education, as well as their position in the society, etc. Anthropologists define culture as the whole way of life of a people or group. Therefore, in this content culture includes all the social practices that bound people together but also distinguish them from others. Tavares and Cavalcanti who point out that "culture is not only present in the classroom setting but also in the language that is being taught" discuss the issue of culture being a part of the classroom setting in two complementary viewpoints. Culture and language are thus interrelated and language is used as the main medium through which culture is expressed. We can therefore agree that bringing cultural studies of English speaking countries closer to students will help them to better understand the language, its background and usage. In addition, vice versa. Better understanding of the language will help the students to accept a foreign culture and their own culture. Apart from this, by teaching and learning any cultural studies at a foreign language lesson we do not include the whole term of cultural learning. With regard to culture in the English language, teaching and learning some authors distinguish between British studies, which focuses mainly on information



about Britain, and cultural awareness, which focuses on the difference between cultures. As Tomalin suggests, we need to create in our students awareness and tolerance of other people's culture, greater awareness of their own culture and also to support the student's own ability to explain his or her own cultural viewpoint. In other words, cultural awareness is understood as a more general term, which is superior to the term cultural studies. Therefore, by teaching British, American or Slovak cultural studies we try to educate a person as a cultural being. Researchers say that most people are not aware of themselves as cultural beings, products of their own environments. In practice, culture is a phenomenon, which is always original and typical for a particular nation. As it has already been stated above, most people do not think consciously about their culture, they simply live and behave as other people in their society do. The issue becomes topical when they are confronted with people from another culture and it can cause various misunderstandings and sometimes problems. The original inhabitants may have negative feelings and prejudices towards the 'strangers'.

Communicative language teaching sets as its goal the teaching of communicative competence. What does this term mean? Perhaps we can clarify this term by first comparing it with the concept of grammatical competence. Grammatical competence refers to the knowledge we have of a language that accounts for our ability to produce sentences in a language. It refers to knowledge of the building blocks of sentences (e.g., parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, sentence patterns) and how sentences are formed. Grammatical competence is the focus of many grammar practice books, which typically present a rule of grammar on one page, and provide exercises to practice using the rule on the other page. The unit of analysis and practice is typically the sentence. While

grammatical competence is an important dimension of language learning, it is clearly not all that is involved in learning a language since one can master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communication. It is the latter capacity, which is understood by the term communicative competence.

Communicative competence includes the following aspects of language knowledge:

- Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions
- Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication)
- Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations)
- Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies)

As foreign language learners move toward critical awareness, teachers should design activities that encourage students to consider new values and beliefs based on facts uncovered during the research process (Galloway, 1998). The ideal format for this type of intercultural learning is described as cooperative investigation in which learners work together to control the direction of their learning while the teacher operates as a guide throughout the process of discovery. This is important because it is not the teacher's role to push a personal viewpoint on the learners, rather the teacher should create an open environment of inquiry so that students can discover the origins of



judgments or stereotypes independently. One important role of teachers of foreign languages is to facilitate communication across cultural barriers, and “one of the most challenging barriers to be overcome is the stereotype”. Developing CCA is one way in which teachers can encourage students to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudice in the classroom.

In order to create a powerful culminating lesson for this study related to critical thinking or incidents, teachers could organize a question and answer session with a panel of guest speakers from different English-speaking countries and regions. In order to prepare for the panel, learners can write questions in English to ask during the session. The teacher plays the role of moderator, who would be in a position to guide the discussion and create connections to the information students have gathered related to stereotypes. The goal of this session would be to illuminate the diverse experiences, perspectives, and beliefs of Spanish speakers, thus reinforcing the fact that stereotypes often simplify culture and discount the multi-layered nature of cultural identity. In addition, this activity gives students the opportunity to interact with English speakers, thereby positively impacting the learners’ perceptions of English, and further developing their critical cultural awareness. Finally, since most of this lesson would be conducted in the target language, students are able to advance both their aural and oral language skills by practicing English vocabulary and grammar language control in an authentic setting.

Famous research carried out in the second half of the twentieth century by Gardner and Lambert suggested that student, who felt most warmly about a language and who wanted to integrate into the culture of its speakers were more highly motivated (and learnt more successfully) than those who were only learning language as a means to an end (e.g. getting a better job). In

other words, integrative motivation was more powerful than instrumental motivation. However, whatever kind of motivation students have, it is clear that highly motivated students do better than one without any motivation at all. If good learners are those that have a positive attitude towards their subject, what can we do if we get students who are not like that? Will students whose motivation is only skin-deep be bad learners? Will people who are not extremely keen to learn automatically fail?

One of the main tasks for teachers is to provoke interest and involvement in the subject even when students are not initially interested in it. It is by their choice of topic, activity and linguistic content that they may be able to turn a class around. It is by their attitude to class participation their conscientiousness, their humor and their seriousness that they may influence their students. It is by their behavior and enthusiasms that they may inspire. Here are a few effective tips of motivation I have collected over the years in my experience.

1. Involve your students - you will not keep your students motivated if you don’t involve them and let them take an active role in your classes. Long gone are the days when teachers talked for most of the lesson, with students taking a passive role? Classes need to be student centered. The teacher should act as a coach and facilitator, to guide and direct the learning process.
2. You should give students the chance to shine - it is also very important to give students the opportunity to be successful. You give tasks where the students see their results of their efforts. That feeling of “yeah”, “I did it”, “a-ha”, feeling students get when they have done a difficult exercise, boosts their motivation.
3. Make learning fun - make your classes memorable. Use games and competitions



during the lesson and it give students a nice opportunity to interact with each other, have fun and learn at the same time.

4. Step away from the textbook - bring in an authentic material that your students can connect with and matches their needs and interests.
5. Set clear goals for every lesson - start your lesson plan on the corner of the board, so that students know what they are going to learn.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, research has shown that there is a close relationship between language and culture, second language learning is often second culture learning and cultural competence is an integral part of language competence. I would like to underline the need to include cultural studies into English or another foreign language teaching. Students must be provided with the necessary linguistic, communicative and intercultural skills to reflect upon and portray their own society, to express themselves, and to present their own culture in the target language. Besides, discussion can be initiated for the students to compare the underlying values and beliefs in students' native culture with the target culture so that students can not only know the difference but also better appreciate both cultures.

Overall, if foreign language educators want to create powerful lessons that encourage students to think at deeper levels about the intercultural interactions that take place in their real lives, critical cultural awareness as an expansion of intercultural communicative competence must become an important component of the curricula. As a result, students who become more aware of the nuances that underlie culture will become better prepared to engage appropriately and effectively in intercultural

relationships.

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