

# SOME VIEWPOINTS OF UNIVERSITY RESEARCHERS ABOUT INTERCULTURALITY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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## Abstract

*The concept of interculturality in foreign language teaching in Albania has been introduced in the last five years and as a result a lot has been written about it. Doing a discourse analysis of university researchers and teachers can help to learn about the concept they have about interculturality which affects the quality of teaching interculturalità in Albania. The corpus analyzed in this paper includes all the papers published in "Revista Pedagogjike", published in Albania which deals with teaching issues and all the international papers related to interculturality from 2005 to 2010. The method of the written discourse analysis of the French School "analyse de discours" will be used. According to this analysis there is a great tendency to excessive theory about this issue, a lack of adapting this concept in the Albanian context, and not very good results in conceptualizing language textbooks that include interculturality, but there has been an increasing interest in adapting it in class practice.*

**Key words:** interculturality, discourse analysis, university researchers, foreign languages.

## Introduction

Presently, when Albania is growingly opened up to an multicultural and multiethnic society, it is very important to explore the interculturality teaching level in Albania. The Albanian university researchers (lecturers and teachers in all the departments of foreign languages in the Albanian universities) have already realized the importance of the incorporation of intercultural element in teaching foreign languages and this is well reflected if we refer to the large number of articles about the concept of interculturality. Analyzing the researchers articles is one of the ways to see how interculturality is regarded, to identify the achievements and efforts that have still to be done, as well as the potential work perspective about this matter.

Papers of the Albanian academics highlight that hard work is done in relation to this new concept at the level of both theoretical and practical knowledge. However, it should be seriously considered if the intercultural element in the Albanian context is a reality or is prone to be mythicization. As a country which has been isolated for a long time, Albania can not be the easiest medium where one may smoothly eradicate some stereotypes related to the intercultural communication, when not earlier than '90-s, everything coming from abroad was prejudiced and opposed by the communist ideology. Such a fact renders the problematization of themes such as interculturality, more difficult, while further considering that the aim is to make it integral part of the foreign language process.

### *Research Issues*

In the framework of foreign language teaching, endless discussions are currently taking

place about the acquisition during the communication process of not only linguistic elements, but also of cultural ones. Some French researchers (Beacco, 2007, Zarate, 2001) are focused on the notion of interculturality, confronting it to similar notions such as multiculturalism and culture. Abdallah-Preteuille (1999:65) emphasizes that the term “intercultural” includes interactions between groups, individuals and identities, to distinguish it from multiculturalism and culture, which are limited to the level of observation. Therefore, when we speak about interculturality, we should take into consideration that it is about an effort and not an objective reality. The authors of this article agree with this approach to address the issue of interculturality in teaching foreign languages in the Albanian context.

The EU Official Journal of 2008, which has also been the European year of intercultural dialogue, stipulates more than 15 requirements to be met in order to “raise the awareness of everyone who lives in EU countries, particularly young people, of the importance of participation of each of them in daily life intercultural dialogue”.

These directives have a direct impact on the foreign language teaching process. Many countries claim to have introduced and consolidated interculturality teaching, but there are also several authors who state that there is still to be done. Because the Albanian context may be one of these cases where there is still way to be followed towards the integration of the country in Europe and further development of intercultural dialogue, it is relevant to explore some characteristics such as the research at the University level, which is conducted and is being currently conducted.

## Methodology of Research

In this paper authors have analyzed all articles of “Revista Pedagogjike” (Pedagogical Magazine) where about 29 didactic-oriented works are mainly published. These articles are mostly focused on intercultural issues, but there are also authors who include interculturality when they dwell on other topics that are more widely linked with the teaching process. Concurrently, acts of international conferences exclusively held about the topic of interculturality or of conferences where this topic is integrated with one relevant ones have been read and analyzed. There are 11 conferences held and 33 acts published about this issue. The titles of the international conferences held during that period in Albania, mainly in Tirana city, are listed as below:

1) *The Faculty of Foreign Languages, Challenges and Perspectives*, International Conference of the Balkans Universities, Tirana, 19-20 November 2005.

2) *Challenges and perspectives of foreign language teaching*, International Conference, Shkoder, 31 October-01 November 2008.

3) *Plurilinguism, diversity, citizenship*, European Conference, Tirana, 7-9 November 2008.

4) *French language in Albania, balances and perspectives*, International Conference, Tirana, March 2008.

5) *Languages, education and interculturality*, International Conference, Tirana, April 2009.

6) *Linguistic, intercultural and social communication*, International Conference, Tirana, 17-19 December 2009.

7) *Translation, language and culture*, International Conference, Tirana, 29-30 April 2009.

8) *Dialogue between languages, cultures and Balkans civilizations*, International Conference, Tirana, 8-10 April 2010.

9) *Discourse, interaction and pragmatics*, International Conference, Tirana, May 2010.

10) *Linguistic and didactic text approach*, International Conference, Tirana, December 2010.

11) *Improvement of intercultural communication, a need for the Albanian society*, International Conference, Tirana, December 2010.

To conduct an analysis of these articles, the authors are based on the French tradition of the discourse analysis. This school, other than the Anglo-Saxon one, is focused on the written form of discourse. It deals with text analysis by employing the method of structuralism, originating in linguistics (Maingueneau, 1991). Currently, the French discourse analysis inter alia “analyzes texts transmitting knowledge: research texts, vulgarism texts, didactic texts” (Moirand/Peytard, 1992).

An effort will be made to objectively group up the most frequent views encountered in these discourses, also investigating the progress of the maturity of thought in years. The aim will not be to conduct a genuine diachronic analysis, but it must be verified if their experience in classroom following an initial exposure to this concept, has brought novelties in relation to the level of research made about interculturality. The papers being analyzed are written in two languages, which are listed here in accordance with the largest number of articles that were consulted for each language: Albanian and French.

## Results of Research

The following trends are observed in the current modern research:

### *The presence of themes of interculturality in the vast majority of scientific conferences*

In 85% of cases, a separate chapter is dedicated to interculturality during international conferences. This issue is viewed in connection with the culture element, making a distinction between culture and interculturality. It is properly highlighted via the frequent citation of some authors (Abdallah-Preteille and Porcher 1999, Lustig 2003) according to the language in which and about which it is written that the interculturality exceeds the threshold of culture and deals with aspects of culture, which are visible in concrete linguistic exchanges. Ample information is reported about the clarification of notions such as diversity, multicultural, European citizenship, stereotypes, alterity and identity. These key words are encountered in all writings of at least two first years and they underscore the thirst for information and the need for particularly the clarification of at least in theory, of some related notions as for example interculturality and multiculturalism or other key notions such as plurilingualism.

At least five international conferences in which foreign academics are invited or participated with papers, have been fully dedicated to the topic of interculturality, each including related areas varying from education to linguistic diversity and touristic communication.

### *A very rich analysis of interculturality through literature*

This connection is commented from different perspectives as for example, frequently from the view of citizenship education and literary approach (Pasho, 2008). This may be explained, inter alia, by the fact that the majority of Albanian academics dealing with foreign languages have historically acquired a very solid mainly literary education. Therefore they feel more confident in this area of research. The articles describing the use of literature for the acquisition of intercultural competence, give above all, ideas about the selection of texts. The main assumptions of works encountered are related to texts which belong to literature for young

people, as it is regarded by the Albanian researches as an important cultural manifestation. Other authors prefer to consider the intercultural aspect in specific works, particularly of the French and Francophone literature. The consolidation of interculturality knowledge of foreign language students also includes the analysis of the role of theatre plays.

#### *Stressing the importance of interculturality in the Albanian educational system*

Through these articles it seems that notwithstanding the efforts of lecturers and researches conducted, interculturality is not adequately integrated in the Albanian educational system in both University and high school and secondary education level. Several authors believe that the work with interculturality should start from this level as in departments of foreign languages they are mainly prepared by language teachers; hence, their education is important for their future teaching practice (Dedja, 2009). The efforts to address this issue in relation to other levels are displayed in particular when we speak about curricula aspects (Rama, 2008), but also about broader topics such as life skills, including the skills to accept cultural differences in other people (Sina, 2007).

#### *Stressing the importance of teachers' education*

A large number of writings deal with the importance of teachers' education about interculturality as the Albanian researchers stress out the profile of the Albanian teacher its own specifics that make him different from a teacher of any other nationality. For languages such as French and German, the fact that the French and the German presence in Albania is inadequate, makes the teachers try harder in further dwelling on familiarization with intercultural aspects. The geocultural context of Albania and their long teaching experience in the context of dictatorship slows down the process of adaptation of the Albanian teacher to innovations and methodology integrating interculturality. Many researchers have placed the focus on these ideas. They even strive to bring proposals or seek solutions such as for instance a more frequent participation in scientific conferences abroad or organized by specialists within the country. Initial and continuous training seminars are also proposed for expanding knowledge and enriching the experiences of teachers (Parruca, 2009).

#### *Connection between the theme of interculturality and media*

The University researchers are particularly sensitive to the topics as the Albanian audience of students is ethnically and linguistically homogenous, thus, the print or audio-visual media represent a very good opportunity of expansion (Iliadhi, 2008). Interculturality is seen in different contexts such as topics of newspapers related to different cultures, but also to different genres such as advertisements, obituaries, editorials etc. In similar cases, classroom activities may be proposed, but opinions and conclusions are mainly given about the numerous opportunities offered by this source of information to be directly exposed to interculturality.

#### *Presence of sociological methods in relation to the analysis of classroom practices*

In cases referring to the conduct of practical studies, the corpuses on which work is done, consists of tests, questionnaires or surveys. These forms of corpus collection are mainly applied to students of foreign languages, but also to colleagues who are not necessarily academics. In these cases, the product is at least a very good presentation of field needs and a reflection for the perspectives of this situation. In 95% of cases, these data are collected by surveying students and colleagues who learn and teach in the Albanian capital. In no case, it is about the work with

transcripts of teaching classes underlying the principles of interactionism (Cicurel, 2008). It seems that the registration of classes to test the level of interculturality teaching through verbal interaction analysis is a practice missing in the Albanian universities.

*Lack of problematization in the initial articles*

In the first writings it is obvious a descriptive trend and broad topics that do not individually investigate a secondary issue. Themes such as the importance of interculturality in foreign language teaching or its connection with areas as translation and communication, commonly emerge during the first two or three years of research with respect to this area. There is a significant absence of problematizing articles as for instance the difficulties of Albanian students in the work with interculturality, profile of Albanian students, a detailed analysis of the Albanian background. What remains are informative articles of mostly theoretical character and if we attempt to go beyond this theory we reach to the other extreme, i. e, the proposal of pedagogical activities that may be carried out in the classroom.

*Similar progress between the concept of interculturality and introduction of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*

It is worth highlighting that in most of the analyzed information, advanced almost exhaustive studies of the importance of interculturality with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, are already conducted. They are two parallel innovations with regard to the introduction in foreign language teaching in Albania and they are highly important for the foreign language teaching methodology (Haloçi, 2008). When jointly treated these two concepts have had only a theoretical connotation. There are very few studies dealing with the Framework of Languages connected with interculturality, viewed at specific moments of the class teaching process. Actually, the importance of interculturality in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is strictly treated and in fine details by the Albanian researchers. Everyone justifies this fact with the need of Albania to shortly integrate in the European Union, and foreign languages are one of the main pillars in this regard. Consequently, the interculturality for them is viewed as an integral part of the foreign language teaching process.

*Absence of religion theme connected with interculturality*

This is an issue not tackled at all in papers for the mere fact that so far, religion issues in Albania have never been a source of conflicts. Therefore, no work is done in this respect at the level of University research. The only cases including these themes are the ones when they are theoretically mentioned in writings, where an introduction to the concept of interculturality is made (Tupi, 2007). In the papers when this is present, such themes are listed among the others and are parenthetically mentioned as part of western values, such as for instance, the relationship of French people with religion and state.

*Unexhausted interdisciplinarity in treating the intercultural element*

Although a large number of Albanian universities have a didactic programme and didactics is known for its transversal nature, no strong trend for interdisciplinarity is noted while treating the concept of interculturality. The writings where such characteristic may be revealed are sporadic and this is distinguished by the fact that studies which may be linked with anthropology, ethnography of communication or sociolinguistics are not included in these writings.

*Absence of initiatives for the formulation of new methods*

As regards the foreign language methods, no initiatives are attempted to be launched in order to draft foreign language methods, where to reflect the change of teaching culture and interculturality. The discussion about methods is regarded as a second hand issue and the idea of drafting these important materials in accordance with the needs and the level of Albanian students is not present in any papers. Apparently, the presence of foreign methods at Universities or at high schools and secondary schools has definitely solved this problem. In fact, methods of Albanian authors which are prepared prior to the implementation of the Common Framework of Reference for Languages are mostly used. In the best case, these methods are attributable to another methodology such as the communication one, where there is still no intercultural approach in the conceptualization of activities. The entire research work that is done about the intercultural aspect in teaching a foreign language, is still not reflected in the foreign language methodology and methods. Some authors suffice only by raising this concern, but no concrete proposals are made (Nasufi 2009, Hyso, 2008). Some others distinguish different intercultural elements across specific methods, but even this has not produced more concrete results.

*Advanced treatment of interculturality connection with translation*

The connection of the aspects of interculturality with translation has awakened a special interest in almost all international conferences. Tirana University has even dedicated a separate conference to this topic. This is the international conference: ‘‘Translation: language and culture’’ with numerous and diverse approaches. In this context, interculturality is viewed in accordance with the interests of different lecturers, depending on the working language, but it is preferred to see intercultural elements in literary works translated into the Albanian, as for instance, the common names (Foci, 2009) or tales as conveyors of collective memory (Dedja, 2009). In the meantime, interculturality is well analyzed, bringing personal experience of translation by francophone researchers, such as the case of Kumbaro, (2009) who brings and analyzes elements of culture in the work of the Algerian writer, Amin Zaoui «Festin de mensonges». There also exist writings of foreign lecturers who give lectures in Albanian universities addressing this issue, such as Gostentschnigg (2008). This author treats in his entire paper the importance of intercultural competence in translation process and teaching.

*Special interest to highlight the importance of intercultural elements in language for specific purposes*

Regarding the specialty language, it is highlighted the difficulty encountered while working with these texts, being linked with socio-cultural differences. Legal and medical terminology is typically mentioned as an example. These two areas are attached priority in terms of the researches in the specialty area, therefore, interculturality is most frequently associated with these affiliations of the specialty language (Lilo, 2008). It should be stressed out that the language for specific purposes represents a novelty as Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and there are different types of works about such notion. Most of them include issues or topics dealing with intercultural elements in the foreign language for specific purposes.

**Discussion**

The written discourse analysis is a very good method to draw conclusions about the concepts of academics about specific issues, such as the concept of interculturality in this

article. In the French University milieu, this method is applied by renowned authors such as Moirand, Cicurel (1991), Chiss (2005), among whom Moirand (1988) is the most distinguished, who, through the discourse analysis, has conducted a diachronic analysis of the development of foreign language didactics in France, laying the foundations of a language didactics.

The authors of this article considered that by carrying out an analysis of the writings of Albanian academics about interculturality in years according to this method, there could be built a general picture of interculturality teaching in Albania. Such an analysis has highlighted practices and trends connected both with the formation of Albanian researchers and the specifics of this context. It is about a context where the mentality of action research is still not adequately developed. Consequently, there are no near-future effects of theoretical field researches. It means that a research work of rather a demonstrative research (Hanetseder, 1992) and descriptive research character (Fragnière, 1992), has been done.

### Conclusions

- As regards the concept of interculturality in Albania, it is properly highlighted the importance of its integration in the foreign language teaching methodology but in each case it is viewed in connection with the language taught. Plurilingualism and diversity are concepts which have been perfectly addressed but when we speak about interculturality, it seems as if languages and cultures operate independently of each other.
- After these last years of the research activity, we may unequivocally state that the writings reflect the most recent researches in the area of foreign languages with respect to their connection with intercultural aspects. It is already a rule to properly read and explain in articles and papers, the views of the most distinguished authors in this area, according to the tradition followed either French or Anglo-Saxon.
- Interculturality is treated by the Albanian universities in parallel to other new aspects in foreign language teaching, such as the Framework of Languages, specialty language, thus diversifying the directions followed by the researches in this area. Such combination does not give the impression of eclecticism. On the contrary, it further complements the framework of researches in the domain of interculturality.
- Not everything could be changed at the level of teaching practices as there are some aspects depending on a series of factors and not only from the desire of academics to bring novelties and change the long-existing schemes. There is still work to be done about the preparation of new teaching materials as documents used in the classroom, language methods, drafting more solid and coherent curricula.
- Some scientific research methods in the area of interculturality (and why not, in other areas as well) must be eventually reviewed, so as they may be efficient and generate a real product. Following an initial phase of theoretical investigations by University researchers, the needs and characteristics of Albanian pupils and students should be closely considered in relation to the acquisition of intercultural elements.

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