УДК 81'.355:811.111

THE INTERCULTURAL APPROACH TO EFL TEACHING

I. D. Garus

The article highlights various aspects of intercultural competence as one of the major objectives in the language teaching at universities. It explores the notion of culture in the context of language teaching.

Key words: *communicative competence, interactionof cultures, tolerance, cross-cultural encounters, the diversity of culture, heterogeneous structure.*

The ability to speak a language, and consequently the evaluation of the level of language skills, is inextricably linked with understanding the history, culture, and customs of the people speaking this language. The cultural ethnolinguistic concept of foreign language teaching presupposes not taking the communicative approach and purely communicative competence as the objective of training to extremes. It would be more precise to speak of communicative orientation of the learning process. Intercultural competence comes to the fore. In other words, foreign language teaching becomes intercultural teaching, learning how to understand the foreigner, aimed at overcoming xenophobia and existing stereotypes.

Most authorities agree that, it is a widely known fact that teaching and learning a foreign language cannot be reduced to the direct teaching of linguistic skills like phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and syntax. The contemporary models of communicative competence show that there is much more to learning a language, and they include the vital component of cultural knowledge and awareness. In other words, to learn a language well usually requires knowing something about the culture of that language. Communication that lacks appropriate cultural content often results in humorous incidents, or worse, is the source of serious mis-communication and misunderstanding. According to Kramsch [4], culture "is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won

communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them.

The term culture is frequently used when debated about essentials of foreign language learning. Before the purpose of intercultural learning in the foreign language classroom can be analysed and understood, a definition of culture and a discourse on the connection between language and culture is indispensable. As a fact, there are a variety of different definitions of culture, which try to define the term as precise as possible. The British anthropologist Sir E. B. Tylor defines culture as following: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."[6] Tylor's definition makes clear that culture is a construct, which affects social life in every facet. A similar approach defines culture as a "way of life", which includes certain customs, religious beliefs, rituals etc. Culture can be either perceived in material manifestations or in non-material ones. The icebergmodel illustrates this phenomenon to the point. A small part of a culture is visible on the surface for everybody, while the biggest part of it remains hidden under the surface for most people. Furthermore, culture never remains static but underlies a process of constant formation and change. This change effects from communication between individuals. Today, it is commonly agreed on that there is a reciprocal influence between culture and language. From a constructivist perspective language can be seen as a part of culture because it is used to describe and explain the world. Language is also coined by culture, since every individual uses language to describe his or her environment. Therefore, culture determines how individuals encode messages in respective situations.

From the point of view of foreign language acquisition pedagogy, culture can be defined in two different ways. On the one hand, culture - as heterogeneous structure - can be distinguished and compared in regard to national borders. This definition makes it easy for teachers to describe and explain the differences between cultures, but does not consider the diversity and complexity of a culture. On the other hand, culture can be seen as a dimension in interaction between individuals, which is characterized by dynamic and convertibility. In this definition, culture is something highly elusive and hard to differentiate. This approach opens a new door to foreign language acquisition pedagogy: since humans, who communicate with people of another culture stand in between two cultures, a new culture is created.

In an EFL class, students are usually monolingual and .they learn English while living in their own country. They have little access to the target culture and therefore a limited ability to become culturally competent. Importantly, their aim for learning English is not only to communicate with native speakers of English but also with non-native speakers of English, which is why EFL learners are typically learners of English as an International Language (EIL). By learning English, EFL students are enabling themselves to become users of international, or rather intercultural, communication—thus, the target language becomes a tool to be used in interaction with people from all over the world, where communication in English takes place in fields such as science, technology, business, an entertainment, and tourism. It is obvious then, that in order to successfully function in a culturally diverse environment, our learners need to develop intercultural communicative competence. The aim of the given paper is to discuss the intercultural approach and present ideas and resources for English language teachers who wish to broaden their students' multicultural awareness. With reference to the latest scientific research it maybe asserted that the primary aim of the foreign language teacher is to systematically and consistently incorporate cross-cultural issues into the FL teaching process, to logically integrate language teaching and culture. It may be achieved through students' acquisition of socio-cultural competence which is an integral part of communicative competence as the major objective in FL teaching.

The true complexity of what it means to know a language is revealed in the useful list of learner competencies produced by the Council of Europe (2001, 101-30). In addition to grammatical competence, a culturally competent learner must possess sociolinguistic competence, pragmatic competence, sociocultural knowledge, and intercultural awareness.

As can be seen, culture is a very broad concept, so to get to know a given culture means to gain extensive knowledge. It seems useful to make a distinction between the so-called big-C culture and small-c culture. The big-C part of a given culture is usually easy to study, as it constitutes factual knowledge about the fine arts such as literature, music, dance, painting, sculpture, theater, and film. Small-c culture, on the other hand, comprises a wide variety of aspects, many of which are interconnected, including attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, perceptions, norms and values, social relationships, customs, celebrations, rituals, politeness conventions, patterns of interaction and discourse organization, the use of time in communication,

and the use of physical space and body language. Needless to say, language is also part of what we call culture, and it also reflects and interprets culture.

Some of the small-c cultural aspects are directly observable, and hence easy to grasp and learn (e.g., celebrations and rituals). However, many dimensions of a given culture are hidden from the eye. Here belong the small-c cultural aspects that, being imparted to us from birth, are deeply internalized and subconscious and are often noticed only in contrast with another culture. It is mainly these non-tangible cultural aspects that have an enormous influence on people's way of thinking and their linguistic/non-linguistic behavior and that, importantly, determine the expectations and interpretations of other people's linguistic/non-linguistic behavior. A person who encounters an unfamiliar culture will lack knowledge of such behaviors, which may lead to amusing situations, and even conflict, caused by miscommunication. This happens because these aspects of culture are unspoken rules created by a community. Because these cultural rules are full of meaning and "allow people to anticipate events, they often acquire a moral rigidity and righteousness that engender stereotypes and even prejudices" [5].

Let us consider a few examples of unsuccessful cross-cultural encounters. Such misunderstanding of verbal or non-verbal messages often leads to the formation of a distorted picture of another society and its culture.

A Polish person in the United States, after being offered a meal and refusing politely, could be unpleasantly surprised to be given nothing to eat, and might even think that Americans are stingy with food. The American host would not realize that refusing food is a sign of modesty and the person offering the meal should insist.

A German person having a meal with a Taiwanese family might feel highly disgusted if everybody at the table started belching, not realizing that this is a form of complimenting the cook. On the other hand, the Taiwanese family would probably perceive the German's behavior (lack of belching) as impolite.

A Briton might be amused if a Polish person, on hearing the conventional greeting "How are you?" started complaining about her health; the Pole, on the other hand, would wonder why her interlocutor was amused.

There are innumerable examples of similar cross-cultural encounters, and what they clearly illustrate is that the knowledge of the small-c culture of a given community is of great importance for successful cross-cultural communication. Even if the participants in the above-described situations spoke English fluently and were well informed about cultural facts

such as famous works of art and religious celebrations, this knowledge would be of little help to avoid the misunderstanding.

It is important to bear in mind that EFL learners are to become successful intercultural communicators, it is essential to provide them with a thorough and systematic intercultural training, and not only of the culture of the main English-speaking countries. EFL students will benefit by gaining solid knowledge of the different world cultures, and they must also develop the ability to compare their native culture to other cultures, to evaluate each critically and interpret the results of such comparisons, and to apply this knowledge successfully in both verbal and non-verbal communication, for both transactional and interactional purposes. Since "culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing" [4], it is of paramount importance that the cultures, not simply chosen cultural aspects, are dealt with during EFL lessons.

Another thing is that successful international communication is reason enough to introduce the intercultural approach into EFL classrooms. However, there is another good reason. In many countries, there is still much intolerance towards and prejudice against other nations and cultures. Intensive intercultural education seems to be a good way to sow the seeds of tolerance, acceptance, understanding, and respect.

In fact, to become a proficient language learner a student should have the ability to reflect on his own learning, to be aware of what it is and why it is important for him. Indeed, he should have the ability to spot and realize similarities and differences between cultures of the target language and his own one. In other words we should promote students' cultural awareness of different communicative behavioural patterns characteristic of the target language cultural community. It will help to raise students' awareness of the target language communicative behaviours, of their own country and develop the ability to explain their own cultural standpoint.

There's no doubt that awareness-raising activities, especially focusing on the development of socio-cultural activities, should be introduced into language learning class.

Students of English in this country must be aware of important cross-cultural differences that occur on the level of discourse, conversation in particular. Of all verbal interactions, conversation is by far the most difficult because it is exactly that form of communication where differences in cultural assumptions and values are most vividly and strikingly perceived by

counterparts. These differences pertain primarily to the form of activity and motivation, form of relation to others, perception of self. As all cultures contain their own patterns of thinking, assumptions, values, and norms of behaviour, to properly understand foreign counterparts interactants should hold to the following rules of speech behaviour:

1. Establish conceptual cross-cultural bridges;

2. Foster an attitude of cultural relevance, which means that since a culture provides a complete system of meaning for conducting life, each culture possesses integrity and is neither inferior nor superior to any other culture. But in a structured situation for a specific purpose, one cultural system may work better than another;

3. Work toward self-understanding. An awareness of one's own culture along with examples of contrasting cultures contributes to the individual's understanding of her- or himself as a cultural being. This understanding assists in preparing for the hardships of culture shock and the frustrations common to working abroad or dealing with foreign nationals at home. Obtaining objectivity in appraising oneself as well as one's counterparts and an ability to separate cultural from idiosyncratic factors in oneself and others is important to effectiveness in foreign cultures.

4. Identify facilitating and interfering factors, those which help work with foreign counterparts and those which are usually a handicap;

5. Develop cultural judgement, since any success relies on judgement, good will, and cross-cultural commitment. It is necessary to maintain a curious and open mind, to question and inquire, and to test our analyses and suggestions.

These rules of behaviour as well as universal Principles of Politeness and Cooperation guide speech behaviour of foreign counterparts in each particular situation. Teachers of foreign languages must form students' cross-cultural awareness and understanding to enable them to adapt their modes of behaviour to a form appropriate to the local situation. This is the only way to become truly masters of a foreign language and culture. It is high time we abandoned the idea that cultural differences are minefields to communication and mutual understanding and accepted the challenge that cultural differences are the relevant source material to be employed in classes of foreign language learners for mutual benefit and cooperation.

Theteachingofcultureimposesanumberof demandsontheMFLteacher. First is the nature of culture itself, which, far from being static, changes over time and embodies a number of beliefs,

meanings and behaviours within any given country. Second is the very real danger of stereotyping, where our cultural influences lead us to impose our own meanings on to other cultures. Third is the danger that teaching will be focused on the dominant culture.

In addition, Byram [1,2] suggests that MFL education has a wider role to play in delivering moral and political education, because of those disciplines' particular relationship with the development of intercultural competence. There is a distinction between three 'orientations', which all young people should be offered during their education:

1) Cognitive orientation: the acquisition of knowledge about and understanding of other countries, cultures and societies.

2) Evaluative orientation: reflection on social norms, respect for the norms of other societies and an evaluation of them in an unprejudiced way.

3) Action orientation: instillation of a disposition to engage with other representatives from different cultures and societies.

Many MFL teachers aim to encapsulate and exemplify all of the above in their lessons, but the teaching of culture at seems to remain problematic [7]. In practice, perhaps because of time and syllabus constraints and lack of contact with native speakers, developing cultural awareness is often limited to imparting information about the history and social structures of the target country, and an attempt to represent 'everyday life' [1]. Learners need to be able to consider the experiences and perspectives of people in other countries and communities at first hand if they are to 'test' the information they have been given about the cultural traits of the speakers of the language they are learning. Computer-Mediated Communication(CMC) can provide regular access to native speakers and a perspective beyond that of the dominant culture, by means of easier access to all parts of the world where the foreign language is spoken. Contact does not necessarily lead to cultural learning, but it can foster positive attitudes as well as supporting students' knowledge about one another's cultures.

Integrating language teaching and culture is a must today. Culture may significantly contribute to the learner's linguistic, cognitive and social development. Students are to be made to realize that culture is an important component of education. Shaping students' cultural awareness will partially contribute to the achievement of this goal. It will help students to understand specific differences between their own culture and the other cultures they study. It is true, successful communication can only take place where there is

adequate awareness of the cultural context within which the language is used.

References

1. Byram, M. (1997) Teaching and Assessing intercultural Communicative Competence. Clevedon: Multilagual Matters
2. Byram, M. (2002) "Foreign language education as political and moral education – an essay." Language learning Journal, Winter 2002, No 26, 43-7
3. Council of Europe. 2001. Commo European framework of reference for languages:Learning, teaching assessment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. www.coe.int/t/dg4/lingguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf
4. Kramsch, C. (1993). Context and culture in language teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
5. Kramsch, C. (1995). The culture component of language teaching. Language, Culture and Curriculum 9 (12):83-92.
6. Tylor, E. B. Primitive Culture. URL: http://www.grin.com/en/e-book/213785/the-purpose-of-intercultural-learning-teaching-about-british-culture-in
7. Wright, M. (1996) "The cultural aims of modern language teaching: why are they not being met?" Language Learning Journal, 13, 36-7

У статті розглядаються різні аспекти міжкультурної компетенції як однієї з головних цілей у викладанні англійської мови у вищих учбових закладах. Досліджуються явища культури у контексті викладання іноземної мови.

Ключові слова: *комунікативна компетенція, взаємодія культур, толерантність, між культурні перешкоди, різноманіття культур, гетерогенна структура.*

В статье рассматриваются разные аспекты межкультурной компетенции как одной из главных целей в преподавании английского языка в высших учебных заведениях. Исследуется понятие культуры в контексте преподавания иностранных языков.

Ключевые слова: *коммуникативная компетенция, взаимодействие культур, толерантность, межкультурные препятствия, многообразие культур, гетерогенная структура.*

Гарус І.Д – старший викладач кафедри англійської мови Східноукраїнського національного університету імені Володимира Даля (м. Луганськ)

Рецензент – кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент Хижняк О.В.