

THE GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

The contemporary crisis of multiculturalism of today's Europe shows the complexity of the different culture patterns coexistence and importance of intercultural understanding and tolerance. This aim is possible to achieve only by intercultural education, which provides not only language knowledge and skills achievement but also the skill of different communicative patterns and values perception in the target language country. This work introduces the aspects of cultural differences understanding as an inseparable part of an effective foreign language acquisition focussing on the interrelation between language and culture based on the leading authors' findings in a few past decades in the field of intercultural communication considering the fact that the interrelation between culture and language has become the interests of many researchers approaching this idea from different points of view. This subject "brings together research in anthropology and social cognition, as well as second language learning, acquisition and teaching. The authors take the position that multidisciplinary studies on culture carried out in various domains of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, interaction and pragmatics, and rhetoric and writing can inform second and foreign language learning and teaching. Conversely, the environments in which languages are learned and taught often serve as research grounds where the impact of culture can be investigated" (Hinkel, 1999, p. 1). The findings of the leading authors of the past two decades generally conclude that "applied linguists and language teachers have become increasingly aware that a second or foreign language can rarely be learned or taught without addressing the culture of the community in which it is spoken. A second language learner's understanding of a second culture is fundamentally affected by his or her culturally-defined world view, beliefs, and presuppositions. These beliefs and presuppositions have important pedagogical implications and need to be considered in second language teaching and learning." (Hinkel, 1999, p. 2) Author's experience in a field of intercultural communication streaming from seventeen years spent working in multinational corporations and also her recent experience gained in a position of a teacher of Slovak language as a foreign language, teaching foreign students from almost forty different countries on Medical Faculty, leads to the findings that foreign language student/learner should be aware of different reality concept perceptions. She concludes that an introduction of foreign language learner into the problem of cultural differences influence on effective intercultural communication should be implemented into foreign language teaching and also that multicultural and multilingual environment requires not only communicative but also intercultural competence and that it is necessary to realise that the forming of these two competences and the harmonic interrelation between them become a basic foundation and the goal of foreign language teaching within multinational environment realising that "the cultural differences cause the confusion, frustration, sometimes even hostility that occur when people from different cultures interact with each other." (Storti, 1999, p.5). In spite of the complexity of the relation between culture and language including the controversy about the place and context of intercultural communication within foreign language teaching, she suggests a general frame of intercultural implementation into foreign language teaching.

Key words: foreign language, culture and intercultural communication

Abstrakt

Súčasná kríza multikulturalizmu v Európe poukazuje na zložitú fenoménu súžitia rôznorodých kultúr a dôležitosť interkultúrneho porozumenia a tolerance. V dôsledku zblížovania jednotlivých kultúr sa výraznejšie manifestuje tak ich jazyková ako aj kultúrna rozmanitosť. Uvedený zámer je možné naplniť len prostredníctvom interkultúrneho vyučovania, ktoré umožňuje nielen nadobudnutie jazykových znalostí a zručností, ale formuje aj schopnosť vnímania odlišného spôsobu komunikácie a rozdielov v systéme hodnôt cieľovej krajiny. Táto práca sa zaoberá aspektmi porozumenia kultúrnych rozdielov ako dôležitej súčasti efektívnej interkultúrnej komunikácie a zároveň ako neoddeliteľnej súčasti osvojovania si cudzieho jazyka s dôrazom na samotný vzťah medzi jazykom a kultúrou a to na základe zistení popredných autorov uplynulých niekoľkých dekád v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie, keďže vzťah medzi kultúrou a jazykom sa dostal do popredia záujmu mnohých vedcov, ktorý pristupujú k tejto myšlienke z viacerých uhlov pohľadu. Uvedená téma "spája výskum z oblasti antropológie a sociálnej kognície a taktiež aj z vyučovania a osvojovania si cudzích jazykov. Výskumní pracovníci vyjadrujú názor, že interdisciplinárne štúdie o kultúre v rôznych doménach aplikovanej lingvistiky, sociolingvistiky, interakcií a pragmatiky, rétoriky a písania môžu formovať osvojovanie si a vyučovanie cudzích jazykov. Na druhej strane, prostredie, v ktorom sú jazyky vyučované a osvojované si, poskytujú zázemie na výskum kde môže byť skúmaný vplyv kultúry." (Hinkel, 1999, p.1). Zistenia popredných autorov uplynulých dvoch dekád v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie ako súčasti efektívnej komunikácie v cudzom jazyku poukazujú v globále na to, že „aplikovaná lingvistika a stupňujúce sa uvedenie učiteľov cudzích jazykov, že druhý alebo cudzí jazyk môže byť len veľmi zriedkavo osvojený si alebo vyučovaný bez odkazov na kultúru komunity, v ktorej je jazyk používaný. Porozumenie druhej kultúry študentom cudzieho jazyka je fundamentálne ovplyvnené jeho pohľadom na kultúrnu definíciu sveta, jeho presvedčením a predpokladmi. Toto presvedčenie a tieto predpoklady obsahujú dôležité pedagogické implikácie a je nutné ich mať na zreteli pri vyučovaní a osvojovaní si cudzieho jazyka.“ (Hinkel, 1999, p.2). Autorkina skúsenosť v oblasti interkultúrnej komunikácie získaná na základe sedemnástich rokov strávených prácou v multinárodných spoločnostiach a taktiež jej nedávna skúsenosť nadobudnutá na pozícii lektorky slovenského jazyka ako cudzieho jazyka pri výučbe zahraničných študentov medicíny z viac ako štyridsiatich krajín viedla k zisteniu, že študent/žiak cudzieho jazyka by si mal byť vedomý koexistencie rozdielnych konceptov prijímania reality ovplyvnených existenciou kultúrnych rozdielov a vyjadruje presvedčenie, že uvedenie študenta do problematiky vplyvu kultúrnych rozdielov na efektívnosť interkultúrnej komunikácie ma byť súčasťou výučby cudzích jazykov a súčasne, že multikultúrne a multilingválne prostredie kladie stále vyššie nároky nielen na komunikatívnu ale aj interkultúrnu kompetenciu študentov. Je potrebné, aby sa formovanie týchto dvoch kompetencií a ich harmonické prepojenie stalo základným princípom a cieľom cudzojazyčnej edukácie v rámci multinárodného prostredia na pozadí uvedomenia si skutočnosti, že „kultúrne rozdiely spôsobujú väčšinu nedorozumení, frustrácií a niekedy dokonca nepriateľstva, ktoré sa objavujú pri interakciách ľudí odlišných kultúr." (Storti, 1999, p.5). Napriek komplexnosti témy vzťahu jazyka, kultúry ako aj miesta a rozsahu interkultúrnej komunikácie vo vyučovaní cudzích jazykov, navrhuje implementáciu istého všeobecného rámca interkultúrnej kompetencie do vyučovania cudzích jazykov.

Kľúčové slová: cudzí jazyk, kultúra a interkultúrna komunikácia

1 Intercultural communication and foreign/second language acquisition

Within the context of the interrelation between foreign/second language teaching and target culture teaching, the leading researchers in this field, such as Byram (1989; 1994; 1997)

and Kramsch (1993; 1998) focused on this topic especially over the last two decades. According to Bada (2000), "the need for cultural literacy in ELT arises mainly from the fact that most language learners, not exposed to cultural elements of the society in question, seem to encounter significant hardship in communicating meaning to native speakers". Hinkel further concludes that "applied linguists and language teachers have become increasingly aware that a second or foreign language can rarely be learned or taught without addressing the culture of the community in which it is spoken. A second language learner's understanding of a second culture is fundamentally affected by his or her culturally-defined world view, beliefs, and presuppositions. These beliefs and presuppositions have important pedagogical implications and need to be considered in second language teaching and learning." (Hinkel, 1999, p. 2)

1.1 Culture and language

In the last two decades researchers focussed on the interrelations between language and thought, thought and culture and also language, thought and culture. "The interrelation between culture and language has become the interests of many researchers approaching this idea from different points of view. This subject brings together research in anthropology and social cognition, as well as second language learning, acquisition, and teaching. The researchers take the position that multidisciplinary studies on culture carried out in various domains of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, interaction and pragmatics, and rhetoric and writing can form second and foreign language learning and teaching. Conversely, the environments in which languages are learned and taught often serve as research grounds where the impact of culture can be investigated" (Hinkel, 1999, p. 251). The studies on this matter have predominantly the interdisciplinary character, considering the complexity of this subject as "intercultural communication is a very complex term because it builds on another already complex term culture." (Williams, 1976, p.87). To understand what intercultural communication represents, it is useful at first to define culture as a term. There were many attempts to define culture for various purposes. L. Kroeber and C. Kluckhorn write in their book that the efforts to define a culture have been taking place in science since centuries (Kroeber, A.L.; Kluckhorn, C, 1952) (In: Mistrík et al, 1999). According to them the first scientific definition of a term culture appeared already in 1871 in the work of E. B. Tylor. It is understandable that the definition of the term culture varies within the history according to the purposes of its definition.

Mistrík (1999) mentions existence more than 200 argued definitions of culture. From the historical point of view he divides definitions of culture in five main groups and each of them comes out from the principles related to the conception of human being. Mistrík's definition of culture within multicultural education; concept is inspired by Claude Lévi-Strauss's work *La pensée sauvage* (1996) (In: Mistrík et al, 1999) where he writes about the creative activity in art (painting) as about a dialogue with a model, a material or a user according to the direction of an artist's effort aimed at the integration of an network as a certain structure and in each of the types of arts he sees all three aspects present where they differ only according to the emphasis given on

one of them (Lévi-Strauss 1996, 44-46). Mistrík (1999) consequently defines culture as a system of three aspects which exist only together where a cognitive aspect "concentrates, contains, processes and transmits information about the world", a sign system "contains the objectivised ideas and information in signs, instructions, records, symbols, norms, ciphers," and an active system in a sense that "all above mentioned parts of culture would not function if they were not involved in the activity of the concrete society and they even would not arise without their involvement in the activity. Contents and the way of their processing are thus formed by culture with regard to their user, i.e. with regard to their use in life of the existing generations and in life of future generations" (Mistrík et al, 1999).

“To simplify the classification of different cultures coexisting within Europe and the world, we found it useful to define horizontal and vertical stratification of culture. Within vertical stratification we can distinguish various cultural groups in a society prevalingly speaking the same language. For the intercommunication of various cultural groups with the same nationality we prefer to use a term cross-cultural communication. For the purpose of the intercultural communication aspect in second language acquisition we concentrate on the differences in cultures within horizontal stratification where we classify a culture group as a nation. Intercultural communication is preferred as a term for the communication among cultures groups within the concept of horizontal stratification.” (Madárová, 2015). As described above, the definitions of culture can vary according to the purpose of the definition. Within the concept of intercultural communication as a part of second language acquisition we prefer to use simplified definitions of culture represented by the Moerman’s definition of culture: "Culture is a set - perhaps a system - of principles of interpretation, together with the products of that system," (Moerman, 1988, p.4). Within his definition, culture can be understood as a subjective concept of ideas, beliefs and assumptions through which the other people acting and behaviour could be interpreted. Focussing on cultural differences Craig Storti defines culture as "the shared assumptions, values, and beliefs of a group of people which result in characteristic behaviours", (Storti, 1999, p.5).

2 Cultural identity and intercultural communication

In order to explain some of the aspects of intercultural communication, besides the cultural definition, it is also useful to have a brief introduction to communication itself.

Ted Slater in his essay "A Definition and Model for Communication" (Slater, 2014) notes that from the etymological point of view, "communication" is related to word "communion" and "community". The origin of the word comes from the Latin "communicare" - "to make common" (Weekley, 1967, p.338). DeVito (1986) formulates his definition for communication as “the process or act of transmitting a message from a sender to a receiver, through a channel and with the interference of noise” (DeVito, 1986, p.61). Assuming that "communication" is derived from "communicare", consequently we could understand "intercultural communication" as “the process or act of transmitting a message from a sender to a receiver, through a channel and with

the interference of noise” (DeVito, 1986), where the coding and consequently decoding of the message between the sender and the receiver is influenced by the interference of specific culture features of both, the sender and the receiver which increases the impact of the "interference of noise" on the process result. Realising this fact, it is important to concentrate on the differences in culture of the parts of the intercultural communication in order to minimise the possible "interference of noise" and possibly decrease the risk of misunderstanding which is multiplied in the case of communication between sender and receiver as the members of different cultures.

Mistrík believes, that "the main factors that influence changes of the cultural identity are: family – by the upbringing, self-reflection – by a self-evaluation and self-education, communication with other cultures - by an inflow of new incentives," and Storti defines "cultural differences, on the ways in which a person from one culture thinks and behaves differently from a person from another" (Storti, 1999, p. 5). Considering the fact how complicated it is to define culture, and how many factors have influence on the effective communication we can understand that "the extent to which language, culture, and thought have influenced one another, and which is the dominant aspect of communication, have been matters of controversy for three quarters of a century, the influence of the work of Boas, Sapir, Whorf, Hoijer, at al. is seen in the amount of both speculation and careful research that has ensued." (Valdes, 1986, p. 1)

It is obtainable that cultural factors influence the individual’s behavior without his knowledge and presuppositions form his understanding of the world. Edward T. Hall, a leading American anthropologist, describes how cultural factors influence the individual behind his back, even without his knowledge. He is convinced "that much of our difficulty with people in other countries stems from the fact that so little is known about cross-cultural communication" and "because of this, most of the good will and great efforts of our (American) have been wasted in our (American) foreign aid programs" and he also points out that people in this position "should be taught to speak and read the language of the country, and thoroughly informed about the culture", otherwise "we simply waste our time and money overseas.” (Hall, 1973, Introduction)

2.1 Concept of general cultural differences

"Although it is known that any generalizations can contain unfair and not accurate statements about the individuals as members of a group, we agree that cultural generalizations can help to understand how people from certain cultural group may act and behave in situation and not necessarily how they will behave." (Storti, 1999). There are many attempts to characterise certain basic framework for specific culture classifications or definitions. For the purpose of the basic cultural framework understanding we use Storti's definition of cultural categories where he defines "four fundamental dimensions of building blocks of culture which correspond to four categories of the human experience:

1. Concept of self - individualist and collectivist
2. Personal versus societal responsibility - universalist and particularist

3. Concept of time - monochronic and polychronic

4. Locus of control - internal and external." (Storti, 1999, p.19).

We assume that introducing the concept of general cultural differences to a second language learner within "cultural matrix of language in verbal exchanges" (Kramsch 1993, p.4) and "blocks of culture which correspond to four broad categories of human experience" (Storti, 1999, p.19) and consequently identifying foreign/ language learner's position within the defined categories will help a foreign language learner to identify the possible cultural differences and consequently avoid "the confusion, frustration, sometimes even hostility that occur when people from different cultures interact with each other." (Storti, 1999, p.5).

Conclusion

Through studies and researches of a few decades linguists and many second/foreign language teachers understand intercultural communication as an inseparable part of effective communication in second/foreign language which consequently brings the issue of intercultural understanding. Author's experience in a field of intercultural communication gained from seventeen years spent prevalingly as a manager in multinational companies and also her recent experience achieved in a position of a Slovak foreign language teacher, teaching foreign medical students in Slovakia, frustrated from conflicts streaming from intercultural misunderstandings, also led to her conviction that a second/foreign language learner should become aware of the coexistence of different concepts within multicultural environment and understand that "cultural differences cause most of the confusion, frustration, sometimes even hostility that occur when people from different cultures interact with each other". (Storti, 1999, p.5). Consequently, second/foreign language learner should become aware of the coexistence of different concepts within multicultural environment and second/foreign language learning containing training in intercultural communication potentially means more effective communication in second/foreign language with members of a target language cultural group.

Considering also the integration problem of immigrants into European society obtainable in the last decade leading into contemporary crisis of multiculturalism in today's Europe we focussed on the influence of culturally-defined beliefs and presuppositions on the development of foreign/second language learner's effective intercultural communication within foreign language acquisition, assuming that foreign language learners equipped with the basic knowledge about cultural specifications within pre-defined categories of intercultural differences feel more comfortable in communication with the native speakers in the foreign language and express lower level of possible culture shock frustrations in the country of target language.

Based on the findings of the leading authors of the last two decades and also on our own experience we can conclude that understanding the basic framework of cultural competence by foreign language teachers followed by its implementation in foreign language teaching is necessary from the point of view of today's globalised world and is resulting into decreasing the

risk of intercultural misunderstanding and possibly preventing the frustration and hostility stemming intercultural misunderstandings often as a consequence of cultural incompetency.

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