

Cultural Competence And Intercultural Communication In The Didactics Of Foreign Languages

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Abstract

For many years European glottodidactics has been postulating for joining the practice of foreign language teaching with the presentation of the realities and culture which resulted in birth of a new glottodidactic sub-discipline called intercultural glottopedagogics, also known by the following terms: *die Landeskunde* (German), *area studies* (English), *la civilisation* (French), *la civiltà* (Italian) or *stranovedenie* (Russian). There is a growing conviction that foreign language teaching should be deeply embedded in the cultural context, including introduction of the culture of a given language area and information about intercultural differences, since despite the fact that in currently dominating communicative approach the key didactic objective is the ability of efficient communication, the indisputable fact is the threat of the efficiency of the communication in the given language posed by the lack of so called intercultural competence. It is defined as the ability to communicate with the members of different cultural circles and nations and the ability to build the „bridges of agreement”, in other words – complex ability to manage oneself in the complicated reality of multilingual and multi-cultural contemporary world. The objective of my paper is the reflection upon cultural problems on the ground of foreign languages, current issues of intercultural approach in the didactics of foreign languages, place and role of intercultural competence among the goals of language teaching, as well as mutual relationship between cultural and communicative competence, theoretical premises and concepts underlying the basis of practical solutions of intercultural teaching and emphasising the function of glottodidactics consisting in approaching the culture of the target language country and explaining intercultural differences, hence the outline of the problems of intercultural tendencies on the ground of contemporary glottodidactics.

Keywords: glottodidactics, teaching foreign languages, intercultural competence, intercultural communication.

Introduction

The starting point of the discussion on glottodidactic aspects¹ of multiculturalism² should be the analysis of the development of methodical views, in which one has to notice a few turning-points concerning the goals of language teaching and their significant influence on perception of the essence of contemporary teaching and learning of a foreign language.

The first of them was establishing that the sub-systems of language are not the primary objective of the foreign language didactics, but language skills. The other was taking notice of the functionality of a language, hence pointing out that through a statement we realise particular language activities, which within the framework of a discussion can occur in various configurations, usually in some subordinate dependencies in relation to dominating language activity, so adopting the communication competence³ as the leading term. The third one was emphasising the link between language and culture, and including in the communication process the variation of terms, norms and behaviours deriving from the cultural distinctness of the participants of this process allowing to find oneself in the communication situation with a representative of a different culture (Myczko, 2005: 25).

Without any doubt, perceiving interculturalism in foreign language teaching⁴ has a specific dimension which results from close relationship between language and culture⁵, because it constitutes the system serving the

¹ About glottodidactic see: Dakowska, 1994; Dakowska, 2002; Grucza, 1974; Grucza, 1976; Grucza, 1978; Grucza, 1979; Grucza, 1985.

² Problems of multiculturalism are discussed in a number of Polish publications such as: Bartz, 1997; Bednarek, 1999; Kempny, Kapciak, Łodziński, 1997; Mamzer, 2002; Torenc, 2007.

³ Concept of communication competence in glottodidactics is discussed in detail in: Stawna, 1991.

⁴ Characteristics of the state of the research, bases and organisation of the intercultural education in glottodidactics are presented by M. Torenc, 2007.

⁵ Issues of the relationship between language and culture and bases of intercultural communication can be

orientation and identification within a given society, which influences perception, thinking, valuation and activities of the representatives of this society. This is why the lack of possibility of acquiring the language without taking into consideration socio-cultural context is emphasised – after all „language communication is often embedded in the situations which are defined by culture” (Myczko, 2005: 28). Aleksander (1982: 5) emphasises that „language as a social creation is an inseparable part of civilisation and culture of a given society. It reflects the differences in the way of seeing the reality beyond the language, as well as patterns and norms of behaviour”, Lachowicz (1987: 141) notices that „utterances deprived of social and cultural context can be grammatically correct but inappropriate as far as situation requirements are concerned” while Torenc (2007: 9) rightly states that „learning foreign languages is at the same time learning different cultures, and learning different cultures is inseparably connected with learning languages” hence the emphasis of the role of culture in foreign languages teaching and turning the attention of glottodidactics towards intercultural communication⁶.

Materials and Method

For many years European glottodidactics has been postulating for joining the practice of foreign language teaching with the presentation of the realities and culture which resulted in birth of a new glottodidactic sub-discipline called intercultural glottopedagogics, also known by the following terms: die Landeskunde (German), area studies (English), la civilisation (French), la civiltà (Italian) or stranovedenie (Russian). Lack of a similar term relating to the didactics of oriental languages and aspect of presenting oriental cultures and explanation of intercultural differences does not mean that teaching of all languages as well should not be deeply embedded in cultural context, since despite the fact that in currently dominating communicative approach the basic didactic goal is the ability of efficient communication, the undisputable fact is the threat of the efficiency of communication in a given language by the lack of so called intercultural competence⁷. It is defined as the ability to communicate with the representatives of different cultural circles and nations and the ability to build the „bridges of agreement”, in other words - complex ability to manage oneself in the complicated reality of multilingual and multi-cultural contemporary world.⁸

Obtaining such a competence is particularly emphasised by so called intercultural approach to teaching a foreign language with the elements of realities and culture, which is the third – the other two being factographic and communicative – way of approaching the presentation of these issues in the didactics of foreign language teaching (see: Pauldrach, 1992; Gębal, 2006). Each of them had taken the advantage of the achievements of the earlier ones, enriching them with key assumptions of their contemporary psychology, pedagogy, didactics and cultural studies, so they often functioned parallelly and complemented one another.

The oldest of these, the cognitive approach (also known as factographic) was based on conveying the knowledge about the country of a given language with the emphasis on presentation of its history and so called high culture, which in relation to course books meant mixing the cultural and realistic themes in the reading material included in subsequent lessons as the background for the presentation of introduced vocabulary or grammar, but not in the form of special complementary chapters which would not induce grammar or lexical progress.

Communication turn which has been present in foreign language teaching from 1970's has significantly influenced the change of the role of realities and culture in the process of the acquisition of foreign languages. The main goal of a new approach was the formation of the ability of using a foreign language in the same way as native speakers do, so the centre of gravity was transferred onto the development of communicative skills⁹, while teaching the realities and culture was – according to this concept – understood as yet another experience of the learners, which widened their mental horizons and helped them to understand the phenomena of daily culture. Course books contained many authentic texts, plain facts had substituted the guidelines on how to react in the situations which the students might encounter in inter-personal contacts. Communicative approach integrated language teaching with learning about realities and culture, it was directed to the development of socio-linguist

referred to in: Wilczyńska, 2005; Banach, 2003.

⁶ Concept of communication competence in glottodidactics is discussed in detail in the following work: Chwastowicz, 2005; Duszak, 1998; Fleischer, 2002; Harbig, 2005; Kielar, Krzeszkowski, Lukszyn, Namowicz, 2000; Wilczyńska, 2005; Zając, 1997; Zawadzka, 1995.

⁷ The issue of intercultural competence is discussed by: Bandura, 2000; Bandura, 2001; Grucza, 1992; Łyp-Bielecka, 2005; Mackiewicz, 2005; Myczko, 2005; Torenc, 2007; Żylińska, 2003.

⁸ Analysis of the place, the role and the measurement of intercultural competence among the objectives of linguistic education can be referred to in: Myczko, 2005; Komorowska, 1996.

⁹ First communicative textbook of Polish is: W. Martyniuk, *Mów do mnie jeszcze!*, Kraków 1986.

competence of the students; its characteristic features include the integration of teaching realities and culture with teaching the language, directing the attention to everyday culture with simultaneous decrease of the role of high culture, matching the subjects to the interests and needs of the students and encouraging them to undertake communication activities within acquired content, various utilisation of factual knowledge.

Intercultural approach which was promoted until the second half of 1980's moved forward the achievement of the above mentioned intercultural competence, which can be defined as „the complex of analytic and strategic skills in relationship with the representatives of other nationalities. Through the knowledge about other cultures and culturally conditioned forms of behaviour, through their unbiased analysis intercultural competence facilitates sensitizing in relation to culturally conditioned difference, as well as change of the existing attitudes and widens the possibility of interpretation and actions of a given individual through such approach” (Zawadzka, 2000: 67). New approach emphasises close connection between the language and culture, combination of language and psychological skills including the awareness of the existence of various activities and communicative behaviours deriving from the membership in various cultural circles; ability to acquire and utilise the strategies of distinguishing the meanings from the contexts and analysis of possible misunderstandings in communication, the ability to identify various communication styles, but most of all – the readiness to empathize with culturally unfamiliar perspectives, in other words – sociological and cultural sensitizing. Characteristic features of intercultural approach to the realities and culture are: culturally conditioned deepening of the ability to communicate, the attempt to liberate oneself from the stereotypes of perception of unfamiliar cultures, turning the attention to the existence of different, culturally conditioned interpretations of words and patterns of behaviour.

Combination of the achievements of all the discussed approaches to the realities and culture is the eclectic grasp which currently dominates in the didactics of foreign language teaching, since „without basic knowledge about the country of the taught language (cognitive approach) it is not possible to try out the social and cultural skills which condition the proper interaction in target language (communicative approach) and aspiration to the understanding of unfamiliar cultures (intercultural approach)” (Gębal, 2004: 130). It is obvious that each of the mentioned ways of presentation of cultural and realistic issues have imprinted their mark on developed concepts and syllabi which transferred the theoretical assumptions to practical grounds.

In contemporary times, in the era of international communication, the issue of intercultural communication and its implication in a foreign language teaching process interested socio-linguists, sociologists and educationalists specialising in foreign languages. It is quite new academic discipline, which was born in the United States of America, the most scientific research is being run in that country, while in Europe the interest in this issue increased after publishing Common European Framework of Reference for Languages by the Council of Europe in 2001. The issues connected with interculturalism are placed on an honourable spot. The document distinguishes general language competence, which is composed of personal conditioning (*savoir-’tre*) – individual traits of a person, their character, attitudes, motivation, system of values; declarative knowledge (*savoir*) - knowledge deriving from life experiences and school education, knowledge about the world, socio-cultural awareness and sensitivity; procedural knowledge (*savoir-faire*) - ability to use the possessed declarative knowledge, life, social, professional and intercultural skills; the ability to learn (*savoir-apprendre*) - communicative and linguistic sensitivity and general sensitivity and phonetic skills, learning techniques and heuristic skills. And linguistic communication competence which is composed of the following components: socio-linguistic element - knowledge and ability to use such social communication conventions as polite regulations, rules of communication depending on age, sex and social status, communication rituals, language style and register, social and regional variations of the language, and other socio-cultural factors of particular meaning in inner- and cross cultural communication; linguistic element - knowledge and ability to use systemic knowledge about the language such as phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis and semantics independently of socio-linguistic and pragmatic aspects connected with usage of given language forms; pragmatic element - knowledge and ability to use the knowledge about the functionality of language forms (pragmatic functions, acts of speech) cohesion and coherence, functions and determinants of style (irony, parody, etc.), scripts of standard conversations and negotiations.

In Poland¹⁰, the interest in the problems of teaching realities and culture in relation to both foreign language and Polish as a foreign language started as late as in the 1980, when communicative approach appeared, and the discussion on the culture studies in teaching foreign languages¹¹ started which has been going on until present day, however, the first symposium dedicated to the role and place of culture studies in foreign language teaching

¹⁰ Social and cultural aspects of teaching foreign languages in glottodidactics on the example of chosen countries are discussed by Banach, 2003.

¹¹ The culture studies in teaching foreign languages see: Augustynowicz, 2004; Banach, 2003; Derenowski, 2006; Kwolek, 1995; Polok, 2004; Siatkowski, 1977; Żmijewska, 1983.

took place in 1977 in Zielona Góra. Conveying the information concerning the history, culture and tradition of a given language area to the foreigners has almost always been a part of the process of teaching this language, however, in the earlier methodological essays and course books, the issues concerning realities and culture were not present in the same degree and way as can be seen from mid 1990's. These problems were discussed in the widest manner on national Polish conference "Didactics of foreign languages versus cultural competence and intercultural communication. Theory – practice – perspectives" which took place in Poznań. The conference resulted in the publication bearing the same title, which was edited by Mackiewicz. As we can read in the introduction: „Conviction of the fundamental meaning of thinking in intercultural categories in the process of foreign language teaching as well as of the role of socio-cultural competence for both teachers and students is common for many papers. (...) Widely accepted demand of intercultural approach in glottodidactics is often confronted with dull reality, where intercultural content is, more often than not, sidetracked or not present at all. (...) Foreign languages courses are just the place for intercultural meetings. Presentation of cultural standards of the countries of given target language or even referring to stereotypes relating to these countries and nations often lead to reflection upon one's own culture, correction of the attitudes and behaviours and readiness to minimize the tensions in contacts with representatives of a different culture, that is to shaping intercultural competence.” (Mackiewicz, 2004: 11). The content of all the articles and papers clearly points out the necessity to tie practical teaching of a foreign language with the issues including such subjects as history of the countries of given language area, history of literature and culture of those countries, phenomena of folklore, customs and traditions, as well as socio-cultural and socio-linguistic issues, for – as Mazur (1994: 36) emphasizes - „the bigger the socio-cultural gap between the sender and the receiver, the more often it happens that the communication message – next to some common elements - contains components which are removed from each other and cause misunderstandings. The latter may originate not from the content of the message itself, but rather from its interpretation caused, for example, by the difference in custom and moral norms, hence the necessity to introduce the students to basic elements of the knowledge about Polish culture and society.”

Results

The key elements of intercultural competence which has become one of main goals of language educations are thought to be: particular supply of possessed information concerning unfamiliar reality, ability to interpret foreign culture against one's own culture, as well as one's own culture against foreign one, the ability to see and analyse one's own attitude and indications of cultural forms of behaviour, ability to identify misunderstanding and ability to widen the knowledge through conscious approach towards cultural dissimilarity. This knowledge consists of such groups as: daily living; conditions of living; interpersonal relations; systems of values; views and attitudes; body language; social conventions; ritual behaviour, so particular information about culture, history, literature, lifestyle, system of values and mentality of a given social group, which knowledge, understanding and ability to use make up for intercultural sensitivity and translate into particular social, life's or professional skills.

Discussion

Development of already mentioned intercultural competence is closely connected with given stages of teaching a language, since omitting specific cultural norms by a foreigner uttering a communicate containing many language mistakes will be accepted by the native speaker with understanding, whereas the ability of fluent and correct usage of a language is also connected with the expectation of adequately better knowledge of a foreign culture. Choice of the subjects and content of the syllabus at the basic level should enable the students to communicate efficiently in daily situations as well as expressing basic communicative intentions, which is why it is necessary to convey the information about the most important socio-cultural conventions used in communication in a given language. Having finished the course on A level, the students should have no major difficulties in taking part in social conversations and form their utterances in such a way that they are understood for other interlocutors linguistically and socio-culturally in the range of verbal contact and social rites. People starting a language course should also be aware of the basic facts concerning the knowledge about the countries of a given language area which facilitate them functioning in those countries and will make them able to undertake the attempt of understanding the ways of behaviour of the natives.

Level	Language fluency level	Socio-linguistic propriety
A1	Person using the language on this level is able to use and understand colloquial expressions and very simple statements concerning every day needs. They can formulate questions concerning private life, for example about place where people live, people they know and things they possess and is able to answer the questions of such types. They are able to introduce themselves and others. They are able to participate in a simple conversation under the condition that the interlocutor speaks slowly and clearly and is willing to help.	Person using the language on this level is able to enter into basic social relations using polite expressions such as greetings and farewell phrases, introductory phrases and expressions such as please, thank you, I'm sorry.
A2	Person using the language on this level understands utterances and frequently used expressions concerning everyday living. They are able to communicate in routine, simple communication situations requiring only direct exchange of statements on known and typical subjects. They can describe their origin and environment they are living in, and bring up the subjects connected with the most basic needs of everyday life.	Person using the language on this level is able to understand and simply express basic language functions such as obtaining and exchange of information, expressing views and convictions. They are able to participate in social conversations in simple yet efficient way, using the most popular expressions and conversation patterns. They are able to manage themselves in very short social conversations using typical polite greeting and addressative expressions. They are able to formulate invitations, propositions or requests for forgiveness etc. and they are able to react to such expressions.

Table 1: Language fluency level and socio-linguistic propriety – level A. (Europejski system opisu kształcenia językowego: uczenie się, nauczanie, ocenianie, 2003: 33,109)

The content of syllabus which is approved to be realised on the level of language proficiency include general and specific subjects closely connected with own interests of the students. Graduates of B level courses should be able to use the foreign language fluently and spontaneously, in the way allowing them to communicate freely with native speakers. They should be able to differentiate and use the right variation (formal or informal) of the language in accordance to the situation, as well as know the majority of socio-cultural conventions used in communication in a given language including verbal and non-verbal contact and social rituals. Presentation of the knowledge about the countries of a given language area should be complemented with elements comparable with Polish culture.

Level	Language fluency level	Socio-linguistic propriety
B1	Person using the language on this level understands the meaning of the main woof of the message contained in clear, standard utterances which concern known issues and events typical for work, school, leisure, etc. They can manage themselves in most communication situations which can happen when travelling to the region where given language is spoken. They are able to build simple and coherent spoken or written forms on the subjects which are known to them or interest them. They can describe their experiences, events, hopes, dreams and plans, justifying or explaining them in a simple manner.	Person using language on this level is able to express and understand a wide range of language function using the most common forms of their expression in neutral register of the utterance. They are aware of the most important polite conventions and able to act accordingly. They are aware and can look for the signs of the most crucial differences between their own and foreign society as far as customs, traditions, stances, beliefs and values are concerned.

B2	Person using the language on this level understands the meaning of the main woof of the message contained in complex texts about specific and abstract subjects, including the understanding of a discussion on technical terms they specialise in. They are able to use the language so fluently and spontaneously to run a normal conversation with a native speaker. They are able to formulate clear and detailed oral or written utterances and explain their views on issues being the subject of the discussion considering pros and cons of different solutions.	Person using the language on this level can express themselves in convincing, clear and polite way using formal or informal register of the utterance – according to the situation and interlocutor. They are able to participate actively in the group discussion, even if the conversation is quick and colloquial. They are able to run a conversation with native speakers without amusing or irritating them unintentionally. They are able to express themselves adequately to situation and avoid blatant mistakes.
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Table 2: Language fluency level and socio-linguistic propriety – level B. (Europejski system opisu kształcenia językowego: uczenie się, nauczanie, ocenianie, 2003: 33,109)

Subject and syllabus on the advanced level include general and specialised language. The graduates of C level courses should be able to use the language fluently and spontaneously in all the communicative situations with native speakers. They should be able to differentiate the shades of meaning and use the variation of language which is appropriate to the situation, what should be facilitated by the knowledge of idioms and slang expressions. During the course on such a level, the students should learn socio-cultural conventions used in a given language including verbal and non-verbal contact, social rituals; they should also possess a substantial knowledge about the countries of a given language area.

Level	Language fluency level	Socio-linguistic propriety
C1	Person using the language on this level understands wide range of difficult, lengthy text and is able to see hidden meanings expressed indirectly. They are able to form fluent, spontaneous utterances quite easily finding the right expressions. They can easily and efficiently use the language in social, public, educational or professional contacts. They are able to form well-built, detailed oral or written forms concerning complex problems, properly and ably using the rules of the organisation of the utterance, and indicators of conjunction of the text.	Person using the language on this level can identify in a wide range idiomatic and colloquial expressions, noticing the changes of the register of the utterance, however, from time to time they need to make sure about some details, especially when they are dealing with unknown accent. They are able to understand the language of the films, including slang and idiomatic expressions. They are able to use the language in social situations in an efficient and flexible way, including allusive, emotional and humorous usage of the language.
C2	Person using the language on this level can easily understand practically everything they hear or read. They can abridge the information originating from different sources (written or spoken) coherently reporting the theses and explanations they contain. They are able to express their thoughts in a fluent, spontaneous and precise manner, subtly differentiating meaning shades even in the most complex utterances.	Person using the language on this level shows good command of idiomatic and colloquial expressions and is aware of connoted meanings. They are able to fully notice socio-linguistic and socio-cultural implications accompanying the utterances of native speakers and are able to react properly. They are able to act as a go-between in communication with the representatives of their own and foreign society, considering socio-cultural and socio-linguistic differences.

Table 3: Language fluency level and socio-linguistic propriety – level C (Europejski system opisu kształcenia językowego: uczenie się, nauczanie, ocenianie, 2003: 33,109)

Thus, the appropriate place of cultural aspects accompanying language behaviour and culturally determined concepts accompanying this behaviour is crucial element of communication competence on every stage of teaching, for language is not only the information channel in the communication process, but each behaviour is a defined communication. Omitting culture and reality elements (or elements conditioned by reality and culture) in the language acquisition process can contribute to the hindrance of communication and adaptation of new cultural codes, or even cause the phenomenon of so called „cultural shock” in the student. Hence the necessity of introducing lexical material marked culturally from the first level of teaching and gradual deepening of the

language competence and knowledge of the culture with its specific elements, approaching the world of values, mentality and stereotypes of a given cultural circle or nation. Certainly, intercultural competence is essential supplementation of the goals of language education in general, including Polish taught to foreigners; its development favours fuller realisation of the superior objective of this education which is communication competence.

Conclusions

To sum up, it is worth to cite the theses on the role of culture studies in teaching foreign languages. Firstly, the contribution to peaceful coexistence of people.¹² Culture studies play central role in this aspect, because it presents the reality of the country of a given language and cultural identity of its citizens. Secondly, the sensitization and development of the ability to deal with unfamiliar cultures through the assessment, relativisation and presentation in juxtapose with the reality of those who learn about culturally unfamiliar phenomena and not by conveying information and plain facts, because in such a way only will they be shown and prejudices and stereotypes removed, while tolerance will be supported. Finally – the lecturers should be the ambassadors of the region of a given language through their own experience and proper choice of didactic material, good education and participation in professional development courses. Describing the didactic and methodical assumptions of conveying reality and cultural information, we can point out the necessity of the form of active confrontation/discussion with foreign cultures through the choice of appropriate material and way of conducting the classes including authentic material, various points of view and contradictions existing in a given society, historical subjects and texts informing about the connections between past, present and future; reference to the traces of foreign cultures in the students' country, and finally – encouraging the students to creative work, awakening the curiosity and desire to discover the new and strange. So important is the role of the lecturers in the realisation of the assumptions of cultural studies¹³, the necessity of education and professional development, cooperation in preparing the material, exchange of information, preparation of appropriate didactics and methodology of the lessons about realities and culture, which should be fully integrated with practical language teaching.

In the literature discussing the issues of the didactics of foreign languages such terms as cultural studies, socio-cultural studies, linguistic and cultural competence, socio-linguistic competence, linguistic-cultural studies and socio-linguistics, etc. are more and more common. The discussion dedicated to the range of material and ways of teaching culture and realities integrated with language teaching has been going on for years, while glottodidactic syllabi contain more and more cultural texts of different types presenting cultural and realistic issues which proves that widely understood knowledge about the countries of a given language area becomes an integral part of foreign language teaching.

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¹² Numerous Polish publications are dedicated to the issue of intercultural education. The most important of them include: Lewowicki, 2000; Lewowicki, 2002; Nasalska, 1999; Nikitorowicz, 1995; Nikitorowicz, 1996; Nikitorowicz, 2000; Nikitorowicz, 2001; Nikitorowicz, 2002; Nikitorowicz, 2005; Torenc, 2007.

¹³ The role of the lecturers in the realisation of the assumptions of cultural studies see: Bandura, 2003; Bayer, 1995; Bayer, 1998; Gajda, 1995; Kęmbłowska, 2003; Kurtyka, 2005; Kwiatkowska, 1997; Mackiewicz, 2009; Miłuńska, 2009; Murkowska, Zielińska, 2003; Owczarek, 2005; Ulanicka, 2005; Zawadzka, 2004.

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