INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE: LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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Abstract

In this article analyzed intercultural communication competence in study language and culture. English has become the official language of many nations worldwide and every nation developed its own history and culture, there are many cultures involved when it comes to learning about English culture. Since the English language originates from Britain, this term paper will focus on approaching British culture in the English foreign language classroom and its necessity for the development of an intercultural communicative competence.

Key words: intercultural communication competence, official language, specific cultural background, teaching, developing.

Introduction

When it comes to the English foreign language classroom, often people's first associations are grammar rules or learning vocabulary. In fact, it needs much more to learn a language and be able to use it properly, than just achieving grammatical skills and knowledge in terms of vocabulary. In order to internalize and successfully apply English as a foreign language in spoken and written code, it will not suffice to merely learn about syntax, lexis, phonology and other features that structure the language. The learner should also be aware of the specific cultural background, which speakers of the English language have. Thus, intercultural communicative competence is a quality, which helps speakers of English as a foreign language to successfully communicate with native speaker. English - as much as any other language - has developed over centuries and was shaped by culture. Therefore, intercultural learning plays an important role in foreign language learning and should be systematically integrated in the English foreign language classroom.

Intercultural communication takes place when interacting participants represent a different communication system. Differences may occur in verbal and nonverbal communication, for instance, eye contact, gestures, touch, pauses, turn-taking or use of time. They are potential sources of clashes or conflicts in intercultural communication. In a case of an intercultural communication clash, there may occur feelings of confusion, tension, embarrassment and frustration.

Intercultural Communication Competence is a form of communication that aims to share information across different cultures and social groups. It is used to describe the wide range of communication processes and problems that naturally appear within an organization or social context made up of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. Intercultural communication is sometimes used synonymously with cross-cultural communication. In this sense it seeks to understand how people from different countries and culturesact, communicate and perceive the world around them. Many people in

intercultural business communication argue that culture determines how individuals encode messages, what medium they choose for transmitting them, and the way messages are interpreted.

The European researcher Daniele Trevisani pointed out the semantic distinction between intercultural and cross-cultural communication should be clearly specified: Intercultural Communication properly refers to the study of the «interaction» between people from different cultures, while cross-cultural communication specifically refers to the comparison of how people from different cultures communicate. In other words, cross-cultural communication is a «static differential image» depicting differences in communication patterns across different cultures, while Intercultural Communication studies «dynamic interactional patterns», what happens when people from at least two different cultures meet and interact, and what «frames» are generated from this interaction, e.g. understanding vs. misunderstanding, agreement vs. disagreement, cultural adaptation vs. cultural isolation, emerging of «third cultures», conflict vs. cooperation, intercultural team cohesiveness vs. team misunderstandings, intercultural projects success vs. projects failure, emotional improvement vs. emotional deterioration, and any other relational outcome [2] .

In a broader sense, Intercultural communication encompasses cross-cultural communication, international communication, development communication, and intercultural communication's narrower referent, intercultural communication proper.

With regard to intercultural communication proper, it studies situations where people from different cultural backgrounds interact. Aside from language, intercultural communication focuses on social attributes, thought patterns, and the cultures of different groups of people. It also involves understanding the different cultures, languages and customs of people from other countries. Intercultural communication plays a role in social sciences such as anthropology, cultural studies, linguistics, psychology andcommunication studies. Intercultural communication is also referred to as the base for international businesses. There are several cross-cultural service providers around who can assist with the development of intercultural communication skills. Research is a major part of the development of intercultural communication skills.

Effective intercultural communication involves more than understanding a group's norms. There have been many attempts to identify the skills needed to be more effective in intercultural communication.

Definitions of intercultural competence grounded in communication have tended to stress the development of skills that transform one from a monocultural person into a multicultural person. The multicultural person is one who respects cultures and has tolerance for differences (Belay, 1993; Chen & Starosta, 1996). Chen (1989, 1990) [3;4;5], for example, identifies four skill areas: personality strength, communication skills, psychological adjustment, and cultural awareness.

Personality Strength

The main personal traits that affect intercultural communication are self-concept, self-disclosure, self-monitoring, and social relaxation. Self-concept refers to the way in which a person views the self. Self-disclosure refers to willingness of individuals to openly and appropriately reveal information about themselves to their counterparts. Self-monitoring refers to using social comparison information to control and modify your self-presentation and expressive behavior. Social relaxation is the ability to reveal little anxiety in

communication. Effective communicators must know themselves well and, through their self-awareness, initiate positive attitudes. Individuals must express a friendly personality to be competent in intercultural communication.

Communication Skills

Individuals must be competent in verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Intercultural communication skills require message skills, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, and social skills. Message skills refer to the ability to understand and use the language and feedback. Behavioral flexibility is the ability to select an appropriate behavior in diverse contexts. Interaction management means handling the procedural aspects of conversation, such as the ability to initiate a conversation. Interaction management emphasizes a person's other-oriented ability to interaction, such as attentiveness and responsiveness. Social skills are empathy and identity maintenance. Empathy is the ability to think the same thoughts and feel the same emotions as the other person. Identity maintenance is the ability to maintain a counterpart's identity by communicating back an accurate understanding of that person's identity. In other words, a competent communicator must be able to deal with diverse people in different situations [6].

Psychological Adjustment

Effective communicators must be able to acclimate to new environments. They must be able to handle the feelings of «culture shock,» such as frustration, stress, and alienation in ambiguous situations caused by new environments.

Cultural Awareness

To be competent in intercultural communication, individuals must understand the social customs and social system of the host culture. Understanding how a people think and behave is essential for effective communication with them.

From intercultural perspective

When communicating with people from different cultures, it is important to remember that culture and communication are strongly connected. The way that people view communication—what it is, how to do it, and reasons for doing it— is part of their culture. The chance of misunderstanding between members of different cultures increases when this important connection is forgotten.

In general, people from Western and Asian cultures have the greatest chance of misunderstanding each other. Much of this misunderstanding comes from the fact that Western and Asian cultures have two very different views of communication. Western cultures, especially the United States, give higher status to the speaker or «source» of information than to the «receiver,» the person who pays attention to the information. Asian cultures view communication as communicators cooperating to make meaning. This model of communication reflects Confucian collectivist values because respecting the relationship through communication can be more important than the information exchanged.

In intercultural communication situations, it is natural for people to be aware of the potential for various misunderstandings and to want to avoid them. However, despite the best intentions, serious misunderstanding and even conflicts can occur. One reason for this is that even though people are consciously attempting to avoid problems, they still are making ethical judgments as they are communicating. The values that people hold affect both their communication decisions and interpretation of what others communicate.

Western and Asian cultures often have the greatest misunderstandings when ethics

areconsidered. For example, an Asian who had a Confucian view of communication would think it perfectly acceptable to give gifts to business associates and to hire one's own relatives. Both of these actions help maintain social relationships. However, people in the United States would consider these actions bribery and nepotism, both of which are against the law in the United States. So differing ethics can cause conflicts, especially when what one culturemay consider morally wrong, another may actually encourage. When such conflicts occur, people who want to be ethical intercultural communicators should try to understand, respect, and accept each individual's ethical perspective.

Good intercultural communicators have personality strength (strong sense of self and are socially relaxed), communication skills (verbal and nonverbal), psychological adjustment (ability to adapt to new situations), and cultural awareness (understanding how people of different cultures think and act). These areas can be divided into eight different skills:

- self-awareness (using knowledge about yourself to deal with difficult situations),
- self-respect (confidence in what you think, feel, and do),
- interaction (how effectively you communicate with people),
- empathy (being able to see and feel things from other people's points of view),
- adaptability (how fast you can adjust to new situations and norms),
- certainty (the ability to do things opposite to what you feel),
- initiative (being open to new situations),
- acceptance (being tolerant or accepting of unfamiliar things).

Cultural differences

Cultural characteristics can be measured along several dimensions. The ability to perceive them and to cope with them is fundamental for intercultural competence. These characteristics include:

- collectivism;
- interdependence of every human;
- reverse of individualism;
- high priority on group than individual;
- collectivist cultures include Pakistan, India and Japan;
- individualism;
- moral worth of individual;
- promote the exercise of one's goals and desires and so value independence and self-reliance;
- advocate that interests of the individual should achieve precedence over the state or a social group;
- liberalism, existentialism and anarchism are examples of movements that take the human individual;
- masculine characteristics or roles appropriate to, a man;
- opposite can be expressed by terms such as unmanly or epicene;
- masculinity pertains to societies in which social gender roles are clearly distinct;
- feminine set of attributes, behaviors, and roles generally associated with girls and women; made up of both socially defined and biologically created factors.

Traits traditionally cited as feminine include gentleness, empathy, and sensitivity. Femininity pertains to societies in which social gender roles overlap.

Uncertainty avoidance reflects the extent to which members of a society attempt to

cope with anxiety by minimizing uncertainty; uncertainty avoidance dimension expresses the degree to which a person in society feels uncomfortable with a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity; Countries exhibiting strong Uncertainty avoidance Index or UAI maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas. Weak UAI societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles; People in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tend to be more emotional. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures accept and feel comfortable in unstructured situations or changeable environments and try to have as few rules as possible; People in these cultures tend to be more pragmatic, they are more tolerant of change.

Power distance
- people in some cultures accept a higher degree of unequally distributed power than do people in other cultures;
- high power distance culture the relationship between bosses and subordinates is one of dependence;
- low power distance society the relationship between bosses and subordinates is one of interdependence.

People in high distance countries tend to believe that power and authority are facts of life.

Chronemics:
- Monochrone
- time-fixed, «one after the other"
- Doing one thing at a time
- Involved with doing the job
- Time commitments taken seriously
- Follows plan
- Deals with short-term relations
- Narrow focus
- Lower risk tolerance
- Self-reliant ethic
- Sequential tasks
- Positional power
- Polychrone;

Many things at the same time, multitasking. Also called «long-term orientation».
- Involved with family, friends, customers;
- Commitments in time mean little;
- Changes plan;
- Builds lifetime relationships;
- Big picture;
- Higher risk tolerance;
- Networking focus;
- Simultaneous engineering;
- Charismatic leadership;
- Intuitive;
- Error-tolerant system;
- Structural characteristics;

- basic personality;
- values;
- the experience of time and space;
- selective perception;
- nonverbal communication;
- and patterns of behavior.

The role Intercultural Communicative Competence in teaching foreign languages

It is important to remind ourselves that even under the best of circumstances foreign language learning lacks the social reality that defines the target culture. Due to lack of shared reality, communication breakdowns are likely to occur. «In order to transmit and decode meaning, we must do much more than arrange our sounds and words in a special order» (Loveday 1982) [7, p. 61]. One has to be aware of the diverse and implicit ways of constructing a message, which are culture specific. In attempting to remedy this deficiency, it has been recognized that communicative competence falls short of our needs and therefore we need a wider concept. Today the goal in language teaching and learning should be intercultural communicative competence (also referred to as cross-cultural competence or cultural competence). During communication, meaning construction depends on the speaker and listener's presuppositions. What complicates matters at the intercultural level is that when interlocutors are from different cultures, they share fewer and fewer common things while other variables increase especially those in language, culture and worldview. Language learners carry a dual burden on their shoulders- unfamiliar language plus unfamiliar culture. This heavy load can only be lessened by expanding and developing intercultural communicative competence.

Without an alternative form of communication and worldview we are bound to think and perceive in our present patterns of perception, conceptualization, formulation and expression of our thoughts from a single point. Mono-vision leads to ethnocentrism, contempt and hostility on the part of the language learner, as he will employ his own cultural frame as a reference to understand the target culture. At this point lies the power of a different cultural experience. In addition to a chance to learn more about another culture, it helps language learners to see their own culture and ways of life in a conscious way and helps them realize that what they take for granted is not objective reality. Therefore, we need intercultural communicative competence, which will take us beyond our mono-vision. Our intercultural communicative competence consists of an extremely complicated set of beliefs, knowledge, feelings, attitudes and behaviour. Irving (1986) defines the term as «... the ability to understand cultures... one's own and others... by means of objective, non-judgmental comparisons. It is an appreciation for, an understanding of, cultural pluralism...the ability to get rid of our ethnocentric tendencies and accept another culture on its own terms. Many cross-cultural interactions go sour due to a lack of such competence»[8, p. 31]

Unless there is sufficient competence, there may be misunderstanding. In absence of relevant background knowledge, any meaning may fail to be constructed. The learners should be made tolerant of and should develop an understanding of other cultures. Otherwise, language learners will be unaware of certain kinds of culture specific behaviour and develop hostility and ethnocentrism. For example, in Vietnam people avoid contradicting or ridiculing a superior; therefore, you are likely to hear «That must be so» as an answer to your question

«Is this the way to the station?» although you are pointing at the wrong direction. Then you may find yourself wondering why the person from the native culture deliberately misguided you and develop hostile feelings to him.

Intercultural competence needed to recognize such things as the place of silence, appropriate topics of conversation, taboos, forms of address, and expressions of speech acts because they are usually not the same across cultures. All above enumerated can be grouped under a notion of context. That is, the problem in misunderstanding a representative of another culture lies not in the linguistic code but in the context, which carries varying proportions of the meaning. Without context, the code is incomplete since it encompasses only part of message. A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit transmitted part of the language. A low-context (LC) communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information vested in the explicit code. Although no culture exists exclusively at one end of the scale, some are high while others are low. American culture, while not on the bottom, is toward the lower end of the scale. China is on the high-context end of the scale (Hall) [9]. For example, for some communities silence is distressful whereas for others it is normal and pleasant. In Japan, silence is a virtue. Japanese people emphasize silent receipt of information and strong non-verbal communication patterns; they have a reluctance to enter into general discussions or to offer personal opinion. A similar view is held by Kazakh people in that the proverb «silence is golden if speech is silver» reflects the opinion that people who are too talkative are not considered a favourably but seen as 'empty boxes making a lot of noise'. Recognition and appreciation of such values are essential to attain effective cross-cultural communication.
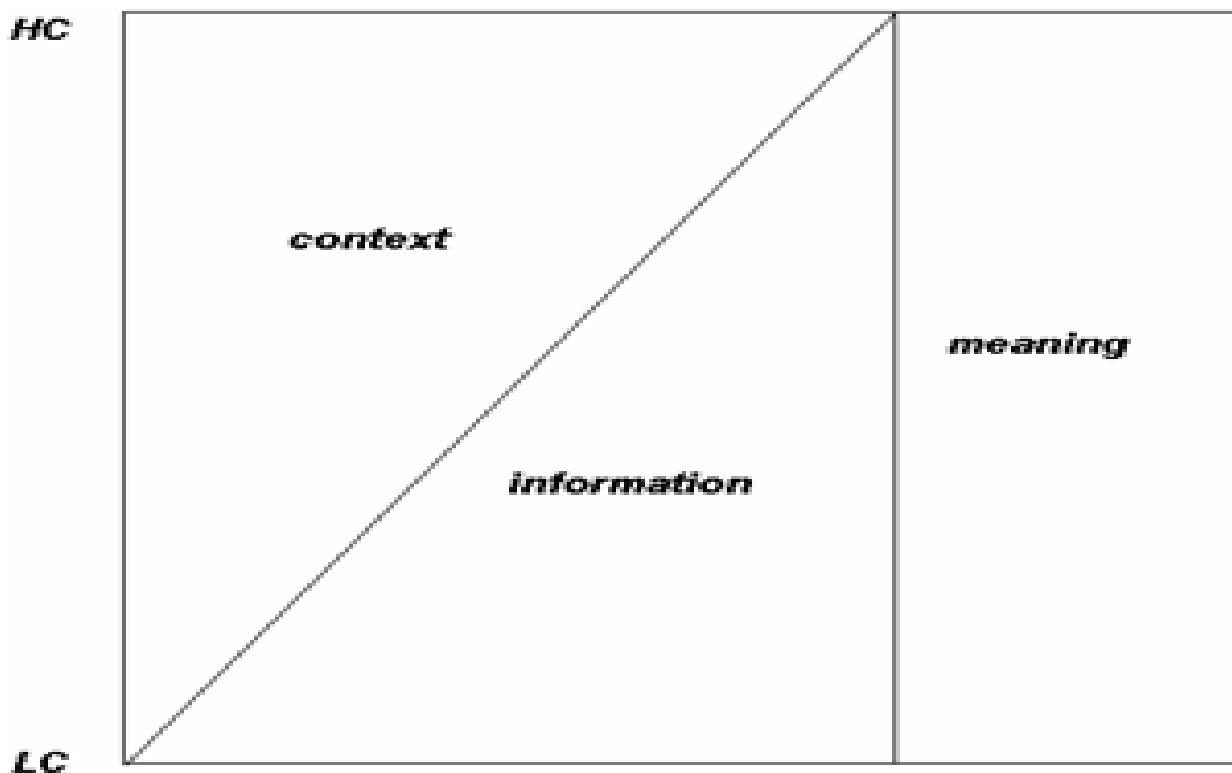

Figure: Hall's scale about High-context and Low-context cultures and their inclusive parts.

Intercultural communicative competence might be identified as twofold: first, a competence that derives from a wide range of knowledge about the target culture including its ways of organizing public life, time and space, its history, its artistic and scientific achievements, its institutions, its modes of social stratification, its myths about its past and its dreams for the future. Second a competence that manifests itself in an awareness of the rules of language use. As all these are indicators of a given culture, both competencies intricately and inseparably tied to each other within the framework of culture.

Conclusion

Language is a double-edged sword: Language communicates, but it also excommunicates. In other words, language includes only those who share the system, others excluded. As during meaning construction, there are several interrelated components, which vary in detail from culture to culture, at work: a linguistic component (sounds, forms and grammar of language), a paralinguistic component (tone, pitch, volume, etc.), an extra linguistic component (non-verbal aspects) and a sociolinguistic dimension. All these are mastered as a part of one's native competence during socialization. Developing intercultural communicative competence is a challenge, but its attainment promises rewards. Intercultural competence offers the possibility of broadening the limitations of one's singular worldview. Just like a fish that is unaware of water in which it has lived or the air outside it, a person who has never experienced another culture is often unaware of his own culture and that of others. Contact with other culture can result in a shift of perspective along with appreciation for the diversity and richness of man.

Thus, a foreign language can be considered as a means of developing communicative competence. This means the ability to adequately clothe communication goals and strategies of their achievement into proper language forms, as well as the ability to use the rules of speech etiquette and social behavior in the situations of intercultural communication, where updated knowledge of the situational and social-cultural contexts is actual.

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