LANGUAGE - CULTURE RELATION
AND TEACHER'S INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract: The paper embarks on the discussion of the relation between language and culture as fundamental not only for anthropological research projects, but also for the development of educational programs and language education policies. The priority given to the study of culture, asa vital component in language learning, shows the extent to which education is oriented towards the challenges of frequent intercultural encounters and communication. At the same time, defining the relationship between culture and language leads to conclusions about the specific competencies of language teachers and their students in multicultural and multilingual communication environment. In this aspect it can be argued that the discussion on the theoretical aspects of the language-culture relation and the related concept of competence, in all its manifestations described below, can highlight the triangulation: language-culture relation – teacher's competence – learners' competence. Grounded on that, the paper states the importance of teacher's intercultural competence for language teaching and suggests the application of the Integrated Process Model as a useful tool for understanding the processes.

Keywords: Intercultural Competence, Integrated Process Model, Language, Culture, Relation

INTRODUCTION

The discussion on the relationship between language and culture is fundamental for various professional communities, dealing not only with anthropological and cultural research projects, but also with the development of programs and policies in the field of language education. The priority, which is placed on the study of culture as an important component in language learning shows the extent to which the learning content is oriented towards the challenges of frequent intercultural encounters and communication. At the same time, defining the relationship between culture and language leads to identification of the specific competencies of language teachers, which they have to develop both in themselves and in learners in multilingual communication environment.

EXPOSITION

In this aspect, it can be argued that the discussion on the theoretical aspects of the language-culture relation and the related concept of competence in all its manifestations, described below, can highlight the triangulation: language-culture relation – teacher's competence - competence of the teacher. learners (Figure 1). A possible approach is to apply the point of view of the mathematical concept of relation, namely relation between two sets is a collection of ordered pairs containing one object from each set. Since culture and language are essentially symbolic systems, we can look for their overlapping or common elements by analyzing generally accepted definitions and theories.
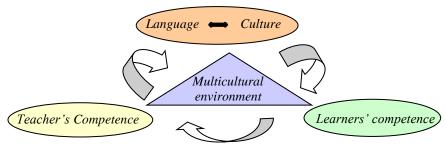

Fig. 1. Triangulation: language-culture relation -teacher's competence – learners' competence

Discussion on the language-culture relation with an overlapping element 'thinking'

In a diachronic aspect, it was Wilhelm von Humboldt, quoted by Boyadzhiev (Boyadzhiev, 1997 to point out thinking as a common, overlapping element of the language-culture relation. The German linguist and philosopher defended the idea that language reflects the culture and character of the individuals who speak it and that the study of languages should be approached from a historical and anthropological point of view. According to him, language is closely connected with thinking and spiritual development of mankind and accompanies it at every stage of its progress or regress (Boyadzhiev, 1997).

To mirror this concept from culture point of view , we can cite the conclusions of Kroeber and Kluckhohn on the main characteristics of culture, which they derived from more than 160 definitions included in the taxonomy published in 1952 (Kroeber, Kluckhohn, 1952). In the substantiated opinion of the two authors we clearly find the interrelation culture - thinking - language.

The understanding that the overlapping element in the symbolic systems of culture and language is thinking gives the green light to an important direction in linguistics, interwined with the name of Edward Sapir during the 30s of the 20th century. The research of this American anthropologist-linguist on the ways in which language and cognitive processes are connected is complemented by the research of Benjamin Lee Wharf and is widely known as the *'Sapir-Wharf hypothesis'*. This theoretical statement propones that the structure of a language influences the worldview or knowledge of the speakers and thus the perceptions of people are related to their spoken language, ie. the difference in language leads to a difference in thought or to linguistic relativity. In other words, the hypothesis states that we see, hear, experience, and make sense of the things around us because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices for interpretation (Wardhaugh, 2015). Wardhaugh considers the hypothesis in three aspects, namely:

'Strong determinism', which claims that the structure of a language determines the way native speakers view it. For example, the way native speakers see color, language etiquette, and grammatical tenses illustrate this statement, as do kinship systems (Wardhaugh, 2015).

'Weak determinism', according to which the structure of language influences the worldview of the group of people who use it and thus affects their culture. At the same time, cultural values are reflected in the language used by people, because by valuing certain things, they perceive them and communicate them in a certain way, which influences the language structure they use.

According to Wardhaugh, there is a third option for interpreting the hypothesis, the so-called a **'neutral statement'** that there is little or no connection between culture and language. This 'neutrality' is supported by a Noam Chomsky's theory, which states that language has no direct connection with the world it should name; that it is a natural object that appeared spontaneously in the brain as a result of a mutation, and that in a single person for the purposes of thinking, and not in the group for the purposes of communication (Chomsky, 2012). In his research, the American linguist provides evidence from biology and psychology to defend his position that language is a highly specialized cognitive ability, which human beings possess since birth.

Another approach in the search for the relationship between language and culture is by identifying the overlapping element of communication, understood as the act of transmitting meanings from one object or group to another by using mutually intelligible signs, symbols and semiotic rules (Encyclopedia Britannica).

Discussion on the language-culture relation with an overlapping element 'communication'

The communication approach, applied after the 1950s, linked cultural anthropology and linguistics, and led to the emergence of interdisciplinary sciences such as intercultural communication. It was first proposed by Edward Hall with his view, "Culture is communication

and communication is culture," promoting the study of culture in connection with the communication sciences. Thus, the American anthropologist shifts the focus of research from the analysis of linguistic communication to the analysis of the relationship between culture and communication between people in general. He analyzes the communication symbols and presents them separately as symbols on a verbal, paraverbal and nonverbal level.

Since Hall, the relationship between culture and language has become the basis of linguocultural and intercultural research.

Development of the concept of competence, communicative and intercultural competence

The term competence is introduced by Chomsky (Chomsky, 2012), who defines it as the ability to understand / produce an unlimited number of linguistically correct judgments, using acquired language knowledge and rules for their combination. The American linguist does not associate competence with communication and culture, but considers it as the innate ability of the individual to speak and speech activity.

The shift from the vision of "language knowledge, language grammar" to "using these grammars in a communicative event", a vision that takes into account the language-communication-culture relationship, is associated with the name of Del Hymes. In essence, this change enforces the understanding that knowledge of the language alone is not enough for effective communication, additional skills are needed because intercultural dialogue is between people who speak different languages and for whom words and objects have different meanings.

Another definition of communicative competence is given in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) of 2006. According to this document, general competencies are divided into knowledge, skills and existential competence / dealing with personal aspects such as values, ethics and morals, etc./ and specific communicative competences - linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic and others.

General and specific language competences are developed through the development of the four basic skills - reading, speaking, writing and listening in different contexts, which correspond to different spheres of social life. CEFR defines four such main areas - educational, professional, public and personal. In other words, the formation of communicative competence presupposes other competences: linguistic (learning the norms of the language and the ability to use them in a given situation), linguistic (knowledge of the language, proficiency in the metalanguage of linguistics) and cultural (knowledge of the language and culture of people).

The connection of the concept of competence with communication and intercultural dialogue is a new stage in the understanding of the reversibility of the language-culture relationship and its influence on the participants in the process. As for intercultural competence, according to the classical definition, it encompasses three skills: to deal with mental stress, to communicate effectively and to establish interpersonal relationships. Another way in which communicative competence is defined is that of Bennett and Bennett (Bennett, Bennett, 2001), who state that

"Intercultural competence is a set of cognitive, emotional and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in different cultural aspects."

On this basis, Bennett developed a model for the development of intercultural sensitivity, which is used to design intercultural learning.

Widely accepted among teachers is the definition given by Darla Deardorf (Deardorf, 2008, 2009), which emphasizes this type of competence as the ability to act effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on specific attitudes, intercultural knowledge, skills and reflection." (Deardorf, 2008, 2009).

The current article also presents the Integrated Process Model of Intercultural Competence, developed by Bebenova-Nikolova (Bebenova-Nikolova, 2016), Figure 2. It applies the dialectical approach to analysis of intercultural communication, defined by Martin and Nakayama (Martin, Nakayama 2000) with its three main paradigms:

1) focus on the process - presented by entering arrows in the forward and reverse direction, indicating process and continuity.

2) relational aspect of intercultural communication research, namely the need for the various aspects of intercultural communication to be explored holistically, in their connection and not separately. In the process model, the relational vision is represented by the inclusion of the two dichotomous modules 'Mind (construct)' and 'World (performance)', which are different, separate, but also exist in unity.

3) the simultaneous discussion of contradictory ideas, which requires the discourse in a seemingly homogeneous group to be seen as intercultural communication between different cultural communities. It builds on:

• Deardorf 's spiral model (Deardorf, 2009) as discussed above;

• The approach of structural-oriented models that consider intercultural competence as a set of competencies;

• Balboni's concept (Balboni, 2006), on intercultural communication, which '.... is realized in the context of communication events regulated by grammars, which contain both universal and culturally specific elements.
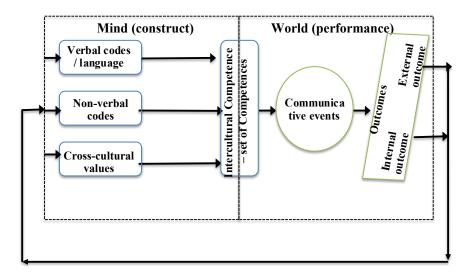

Fig. 2. Integrated process model for acquiring intercultural competence

The integrated process model of Figure 2 integrates the above approaches by introducing:

• blocks 'Verbal codes', 'Non-verbal codes' and 'Cross-cultural knowledge'.

• block 'Intercultural competence as a set of competences'

• 'Communication events' block

• 'Result' block (internal and external).

By applying the 'drop-down menu', each of these blocks can be further defined and discussed for the needs of the specific scientific field. For example, to consider the above introduced triangulation on Figure 1, the block can be further detailed to embrace the pedagogical skills of foreign language teachers. It can also be used to assess the competencies acquired by the learners.

The model is applicable in the understanding of plurilingualism and pluricultural competence as the ability of a social actor who speaks various languages at different levels and with experience in different cultures to use his knowledge in intercultural interaction.

To sum up, it might be applied for the analysis of intercultural competence in any communication process, regardless of the linguistic or cultural affiliation of the participants and under any language learning circumstances, including the intercultural classroom.

CONCLUSION

The current discussion shows that the existing reversible relationship between the language-communication-culture is directly related to the understanding of the competence of teachers and learners. In the context of a multicultural and multilingual classroom, the aim of language learning is to act effectively and appropriately in everyday intercultural situations based on specific attitudes, intercultural knowledge, skills and reflection. As Zhelezova-Mindizova points out "The use of interactive and non-traditional approaches to training leads to opening the schools and promoting active collaboration between different institutions, organizing competitions and other formats that enable young people to express themselves and actively participate in social interaction" (Zhelezova-Mindizova , 2016).

Taking into account intercultural interactions in the language learning process challenges all participants to learn how to construct their knowledge, interact and relate their experiences to current situations, using metacognitive strategies that guide them to think, plan and assess their language development and understanding of the corresponding culture. It is therefore important to view this type of competent behavior as intercultural competence.

In addition, the triangulation presents the competence of both the teacher and the learner as subjected to a continuous process of development in response to the dynamics of intercultural encounters and the intensive development of science, technology and human knowledge. This process as for Zhelezova-Mindizova "involves students constructing meaning by connecting new knowledge with existing knowledge" (Zhelezova-Mindizova, 2019).Although, there is currently no national framework on evaluating, we can assume that education for multicultural goals and in a multicultural environment should offer communication events related to the culture of the language being studied. This is the way of acquiring effective and appropriate behavior in intercultural situations and reflective assessment of its assessment to enrich the attitudes, intercultural knowledge and skills of both teachers and learners.

This approach also reflects the recommendations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2018 to apply an action-oriented approach in the classroom and to include students in a communicative learning process close to the reality of the studied culture.

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