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DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCE AMONG STUDENTS OF LAW THROUGH INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

In our globalized world intercultural competence is increasingly necessary for students of Law as communication with people from multicultural backgrounds has become crucial in their professional practice. It involves expanding their worldview to understand and respect customs and values of other cultures. The paper discusses various models, defines the skills that should be critical for intercultural interactions and assesses intercultural language learning in the context of the needs of students of Law.

KEYWORDS: intercultural language learning, intercultural skills, legal skills, intercultural communication, foreign language education

INTRODUCTION

The past decades have seen the increasingly rapid development of interaction between people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The technological progress in transportation and communication and a significant increase in global mobility have strengthened the need for effective intercultural communication in more and more cosmopolitan world. Contacts between representatives of various cultures have become part of an everyday routine. Culturally diverse workplaces pose more challenges and professionals need to be equipped with competences at both personal and professional level. This article discusses the need for preparation of future lawyers for the abovementioned challenges in the context of intercultural communication. Lawyers talk to their clients, negotiate contracts and resolve conflicts, mediate and act as advocates before courts, draft letters, statements of case and other documents. All of this communication may be disrupted by distortions and misperceptions, inter alia due to intercultural reasons.

LAWYERS AS COMMUNICATORS AND CONFLICT RESOLVERS

The area of intercultural communication is recognized as part of legal skills by many researchers (inter alia Maughan/ Webb 2005, Whalen-Bridge 2014). There are two main areas where lawyers need their intercultural skills, i.e. communication and conflict resolution. Nevertheless, the problems with communication seems to be complex.

As argued by Maughan and Webb (2005: 67) the very fact of being a trained lawyer presents a culture gap between a lawyer and a client. The reasons for that are manifold.

First of all, there is an issue of lawyers' discourse. As Tiersma (1999: 51) noted "Lawyers use their language to set themselves apart from the mass of a population", which in turn results in high specificity of this jargon. They often fall into a trap of using jargon even if it is not necessary.

Tiersma (1999: 95) emphasizes that the legal lexicon consists of many obsolete English words and grammatical constructions, e.g. *shall* and *do*, that do not enhance communication and often impede comprehension due to the use of anachronisms. Archaic language seems to be authoritative and majestic and simply helps justify the monopoly of the profession. Mattila (2012: 28) identifies several characteristics of legal language. He highlights the culture specificity of legal concepts, as legal concepts frequently appear in one or some legal systems. The most important are the differences between two legal systems: *the common law*, characteristic for Britain and the USA, and *the civil law* characteristic for continental Europe including Poland. However, even inside those two systems there are conceptual differences. Another feature of legal language is *polysemy*, which means that within a single legal culture the same term can have many meanings in many contexts. This polysemy is the result of a constant change of the legal system. Nowadays, the European Union is the cause of introducing a lot of polysemy as traditional legal terms acquire new meanings specific for the EU due to the fact that there are twenty three language versions of each enactment in the European Union.

As far as the style is concerned, Tiersma (2000: 55) claims that "lawyers often adopt a style that does not communicate all that well, at least to general public". The features of that style include very long sentences, with many conjoined and embedded clauses. Tiersma (Ibid.: 56) offers examples of extremely long sentences of even 740 words that can be found in the British statutes. Legal discourse is characterised by the lack of pronoun references within the sentence and across the boundaries, and by the fact that punctuation is kept to a minimum (Tiersma 2012: 47). There is also a lot of wordiness and redundancy, and inclination to use adverbial phrases e.g. *at slow speed* over adverbs e.g. *slowly*. This redundancy often involves a violation of the principle of conciseness and out of all specialised discourse it is Legal English that displays the highest occurrence of this characteristic. Despite the fact that legal professionals focus on precision, which should be a prominent feature of specialised

discourse, legal English is the example of specialised discourse where terms are “to a certain extent referentially fuzzy” (Gotti 2003: 49). Moreover, as Whalen-Bridge emphasizes (2014) “Students’ legal culture and legal training predisposes them to see law in a certain way, and so what students see and what they need to understand is determined in a very fundamental way by their legal identity”. There is a discrepancy between legal and everyday discourse and lawyers need translation skills to translate the client’s problem into an object that constitutes some legal identity. Some researchers claim that this ability to move between discourses, i.e. code-switching, is not universal among legal practitioners (Maughan/ Webb 2005: 68).

Another area which is closely connected with intercultural competence is conflict resolution. The skills are regarded as a vital lawyering skill (Maughan/ Webb 2005) and needed in the context of decision-making, conflicts of interest, legal negotiations and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). One of the roles of a lawyer is defined by Mackie (1989: 95-96) as ‘the conflict blocker’ and it involves minimizing the risk of any future conflict. However, equally important are roles of conflict-managing and conflict-resolution. Being effective in all those areas requires skills of overcoming whatever barriers that exist in a given situation, including the cultural ones. Maughan and Webb (2005: 315) draw our attention to the fact that lawyers and clients may approach the process of dispute resolution with diverse worldviews. At the same time lawyers often focus on the legal issues, and may neglect other dimensions of the dispute that are vital for clients. As Whalen-Bridge (2014: 34) highlights “Given the variety of jurisdictions that law students can potentially encounter, and the fundamental manner in which student assumptions about law and legal culture may be wrong, students preparing for a more global practice need to learn how to ask the right questions”.

What is crucial is that the perceptions of the reality vary and there may be a gap between client’s and lawyer’s expectations. Bridging these gaps involves taking into consideration contextual factors and understanding real interests of the parties involved. Also, even inventing options for mutual gains for other parties to reconcile the conflicting interests requires deep understanding of all needs and interests. The specific problems of intercultural communication disrupting the mutual understanding between the parties from diverse cultural backgrounds are discussed in detail below.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

Lawyers are a group of workers that are faced with challenges of communication, inter alia because communication behavior varies reflecting differences in thinking patterns across cultures. Belonging to diverse communication cultures results in different thinking styles. North Europeans and Northern Americans, especially men, tend to value and use a linear, logical thinking style, which is culturally embedded.

If a speaker strays from the topic, a listener often responds by saying “I don’t follow” or “Get to the point”. This Western style of rational, critical thinking is not shared by many Africans, or people from Arab, Asian or even Latin cultures. As Maughan and Webb (2005: 76) point out that contextual approach, and not linear style, is more typical even of European American women. The former style is perceived by advocates of the latter as vague, evasive and illogical (Bennett 1998: 20-21). These differences in styles may be examined in relation with Hall’s theory of high/low context orientations (Hall 1976).

According to Hall (1976: 91) context is understood as “the information that surrounds an event; it is inextricably bound up with the meaning of the event”. A high context communication is one in which most of the information is in the person, and little in the explicitly transmitted part of the message. On the other hand, a low context communication is the opposite. High context cultures are often traditional cultures, and meaning is often provided by gestures, silence or mere inference. What is more, people from high context cultures can express and interpret various feelings without verbal statements. In low context cultures the verbal message provides a lot of detail and very little is embedded in the context, so interlocutors do not make assumptions about each other’s knowledge. Those dimensions may explain how misunderstanding occurs when two people from different cultures interact.

Furthermore, Hall (1976) noted that there is a strong association between high and low cultures on the one hand and collectivistic and individualistic cultures on the other. Generally, collectivistic cultures engage in a high context language, and individualistic ones engage in a low context language. There are exceptions to this rule, but categorizing appropriately given culture makes it possible to establish how much information is needed when talking with the culture representative.

Researchers nowadays agree that the problems of communication lie not solely in the language, but, *inter alia* in values and assumptions that underlie human behavior. The dimension collectivism vs. individualism is one the notions developed by Hofstede (1983) which is the most commonly discussed in this context. One of the notions crucial for understanding and fundamental to Western Culture is ‘self versus society’ assumption that the society may be the enemy of the individual due to the demands it imposes on the individual’s desire for self-realization. Conversely, many African and Asian cultures view the self as existing solely in relation with others, and duties to the group supersede individual rights and the ‘pursuit of happiness’. Ting-Toomey (2008) argues that it has far reaching effects and that sources of intercultural conflict are often connected with cultural or ethnic value clashes, communication decoding issues and problems with inattention. Bennett (1998: 15) labels the misunderstandings “clash of differing realities”. The cultural value clashes may involve using dominating, competing style by individualistic culture representatives while collectivist culture representatives have the tendency to use more indirect style. Of course, this dimension is not a stable one and may change

over time. Moreover, a given culture is neither individualistic nor collectivistic, but it may be placed along a continuum between those end points. Nevertheless, the influence of this concept needs to be taken into consideration due to the fact that in order to build understanding we need to try to comprehend subtle and complex differences that are based on the values instilled from very early on into us all.

Conflict resolution is an example of the area where the communication differences between high and low context cultures are visible. Conflict is considered harmful in low context cultures. As Ting-Toomey (1997: 394) sums it up for those cultures “conflict should be dealt with discreetly and subtly.” It is harmony that leads to diffusing conflict. Conversely, Western public discourse has been labeled “argument culture” (Tannen 1998: 5) that glorifies conflict and aggression, and at the same time it tends to overuse a battle metaphor. In the Middle East, conflict is perceived as a natural way of life and people express their feelings in an animated and confrontational manner (Samovar et al. 2010: 321). It should be noted that both perception and the way we handle conflicts are rooted in culture and as such certain skills are required to resolve them effectively. There is definitely a need for future lawyers, as Chen and Starosta (2006: 357) put it, to become ‘interculturally competent persons’, who ‘know how to elicit a desired response in interactions and to fulfill their own communication goals by respecting and affirming the worldview and cultural identities of the interactants’.

As Jackson (2014: 257) argues “culture plays a role in all conflict situations” either in a dominant or more subtle way. She draws our attention to the fact that there is a range of cultural elements that fuel intercultural conflict situations. The first one is mismatched expectations. According to expectancy violation theory (Burgoon 1995), if individuals or groups do not perform as culturally expected, miscommunication and negative perceptions are developed. Expectations are formed based on the underlying prevalent values and norms in a given culture, as ideas what is appropriate are learned during the process of socialization. The implicit culturally-based scripts influence also our expectations how to resolve a conflict. Another element is ambiguity and uncertainty which appears in interactions between the parties from diverse linguistic and cultural background. Gudykunst (2004) maintains that resolving conflicts becomes more effective if apprehension level is lower. Word choice, verbal communication style, and non-verbal behavior are crucial in all conflict situations as inappropriate verbal and nonverbal behavior may escalate a conflict. Face is another element and a social phenomenon that applies to conflict situations. It comprises our identity, self-esteem and honor. The problems in this area are connected with e.g. difficult, awkward and unexpected requests resulting in individuals being embarrassed and not knowing how to respond. Lastly, there are problems of differing perspectives and different understandings of conflict. The view of it is definitely influenced by gender and culture.

Ting-Toomey (2012: 279-80) proposes the construct of intercultural conflict competence and refers to it as “the mindful management of emotional frustrations

and conflict interaction struggles due primarily to cultural, linguistic, or ethnic group membership differences”. This view is supported by Robles (2013: 107) who emphasizes that “Explanations of intercultural conflict as miscommunication assume that if speakers knew the different meanings of speech codes in different speech communities, fewer conflicts would occur”. The key elements of the construct of intercultural conflict competence encompass culture-sensitive knowledge, mindfulness, constructive conflict communication skills and communication adaptability. It is worth noticing that among constructive communication skills Ting-Toomey (2012: 288) lists such skills as: deep-listening, de-centring, face-sensitive respectful dialogue skills, mindful reframing, comprehension checks and collaborative conflict negotiation skills. Those individuals who possess the abovementioned skills are in a stronger position to deal with intercultural problems. The key problem is that although developing intercultural competence to successfully communicate with people from other cultures is vital, it is not an easy task for teachers and there seems to be not enough practical solutions how to do it effectively. Let’s know look at various conceptual models connected with developing intercultural competence.

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

There are various conceptual models, definitions and terms concerning intercultural competence that have been proposed by researchers from different disciplines. Although the concept has been used frequently by scholars for over thirty years there is no single definition that has been agreed on according to Deardoff (2006). Jackson (2014: 305) identifies that the current understanding of intercultural competence comprises mainly issues of intercultural adjustment in unfamiliar cultural contexts, and intercultural traits, knowledge and behaviors in any intercultural context. However, she emphasizes the need to examine diverse perspectives of scholars and practitioners from various areas of specialization, as it enables us to understand the concept and define the most effective approach of how to train people to become interculturally competent. That is why various models from diverse disciplines are discussed below.

Models of intercultural competence have been proposed by scholars from different disciplines, such as applied linguists, cross-cultural psychologists, anthropologists, international educators and others. One of the most known and cited is Bennett’s (1993) *developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS)*. It assumes that there is a gradual evolution from *ethnocentrism*, which implies that ‘the worldview of one’s own culture is central to all reality (Ibid: 30), to *ethnorelativism*, which is linked to ‘being comfortable with many standards and customs and having an ability to adapt behavior and judgments to a variety of interpersonal settings’ (Ibid: 26), within the context of intercultural interactions.

Bennett & Bennett (2004: 149) point out that “The underlying assumption of the model is that as one’s experience of cultural difference becomes more sophisticated, one’s competence in intercultural relations increases”. This model is regarded as a developmental phenomenon and in view of it the implications may include identity reconstruction in some individuals.

Gudykunst (1993) devised her *anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM)* model based on communication with strangers. A stranger is someone who is geographically close, but interculturally distant, and his or her culture is distinctly different. Gudykunst claims that a measure of anxiety is involved in communication with strangers as there is a potential inability to predict, understand and explain the stranger’s behavior in the context of cultural differences. Anxiety and uncertainty management is identified as a prerequisite to effective communication. The AUM model identifies factors influencing intercultural effectiveness, i.e. self-concept, motivation to interact, reaction to strangers, social categorization of strangers, situational processes, and connection with strangers. Gudykunst (1993) highlights that a mindful communicator should be alert to subtle nuances in communication and adjust to them appropriately and deliberately. It is worth noticing that the model has been criticized for a simplistic view of communication and a Westernized view of communication process (Watson 2013: 56).

Byram’s (1997) *model of intercultural communicative competence* has immensely influenced teaching of foreign languages, especially in Europe. It is built on the Hymes’ (1966) notion of communicative competence and includes linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence. The framework defines five *savoirs* linked to the cultural competence, and two of them: *savoir être* (intercultural attitudes) and *savoirs* (knowledge) are considered prerequisites for effective intercultural communication. The rest encompass *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), *savoir apprendre/faire* (skills of discovery and interaction) and *savoir s’engager* (critical cultural awareness). It emphasizes the importance of openness and curiosity and the importance of learning about values and practices of other cultures and learners’ own one. It highlights the role of the language component as a part of intercultural competence.

Chen and Starosta’s *model of intercultural communication competence* comprises three interrelated dimensions: *affective or intercultural sensitivity*, *cognitive or intercultural awareness* and *behavioral or intercultural adroitness*. It emphasizes the role of affective or intercultural sensitivity, which is defined as “positive emotion that enables individuals to be sensitive enough to acknowledge and respect cultural differences” (Chen/ Starosta 2008: 223). Cognitive or intercultural awareness is understood as awareness of one’s own personal identities and cultural differences. Behavioral or intercultural adroitness is connected with “message skills, knowledge regarding appropriate self-disclosure, behavioral flexibility, interaction management and social skills” (Ibid: 227). The model puts emphasis on multiple perspectives and identities in the global context.

Deardoff (2006) devised her *process model of intercultural competence* as an ongoing, circular process with no end and no clear point of entry, in which an individual may move freely between categories. As Moeller & Nugent (2014: 5) point out previous models describe the intercultural learning as linear, while this circular model focuses on the continuity of the process and the complexity of the journey which is not just the movement from one point to another. It accentuates the importance of attitude of openness, respect, curiosity, and discovery (Deardoff 2004: 193). It also proposes external outcomes that can be evaluated, e.g. *behaving and communicating appropriately and effectively* in intercultural situations. As Deardoff (2008: 42) points out this model provides “a holistic framework for intercultural competence development and assessment”.

Besides conceptual models many researchers have proposed an array of components of intercultural competence. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013: 23-24) identify the following:

- 1) accepting that one’s practices are influenced by the cultures of interlocutors;
- 2) accepting that there is no one right way;
- 3) valuing one’s own and other cultures;
- 4) using language to explore culture;
- 5) finding personal ways of engagement in intercultural interaction;
- 6) using current knowledge of cultures as a resource for learning about new ones;
- 7) finding a personal intercultural style and identity.

Developing intercultural competence includes awareness of interrelationships between language and culture, sense of self as a user of language and the ability to analyze and explain this awareness, so meta-awareness (Liddicoat/ Scarino 2013: 50). Moreover, it is strictly connected with recognizing relativity of culture and that “all behaviors are culturally variable” (Ibid: 24). It also is connected with abilities that learners should have. Cultural knowledge is connected with understanding the context and pragmatic ability. As Yule (1996: 3-4, cf. Cohen Ishihara 2010: 5) defines “Having pragmatic ability means being able to go beyond the literal meaning of what is said or written, in order to interpret the intended meanings, assumptions, purposes or goals, and the kinds of actions that are being performed”. It enables learners to avoid across-cultural misunderstandings and to go beyond the literal meaning of what is communicated.

In foreign language study, the concept of intercultural competence has been closely connected with communicative competence (cf. Byran 1997). However, language proficiency is no longer the sole goal of language education, and there is a need for intercultural focus to prepare students to collaborate and interact with others in the global world. Only when language skills and intercultural competency are interlocked learners are prepared to live and work in the modern, increasingly multicultural society. Many researchers and specialists in intercultural pedagogy concur with Ryan’s view (2003: 132) that “residence in another country does not automatically produce interculturality”. Furthermore, even a very high level of

proficiency in a foreign language does not equal achieving intercultural competence. As Bennett (1997: 16-21) suggests there is a possibility that a person may be 'a fluent fool', which means "someone who speaks a foreign language well, but doesn't understand the social or philosophical content of that language". That is why it is crucial to introduce intercultural language learning into curricula to prepare learners for the challenges of the modern world.

INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

There has been a growing volume of published studies describing the importance of an intercultural focus in language education. Questions, however, have been raised about how to integrate language, culture and learning effectively and what the relationship between them is. Kramsch (2008) draws our attention to the fact that the focus of teaching of any language should not be solely on the linguistic code, but also on teaching meaning. Liddicoat (2002) argues for studying culture as a process in which learners engage, rather than cultural facts and information. This concept of dynamic and evolving culture, i.e. a framework in which "the individual achieves his/her sense of identity" (Liddicoat/ Scarino 2013: 23), is connected with a view of the individual as a semiotic system. The researchers (2013: 24) highlight that new approaches to the teaching of culture stress a belief that language and context are intertwined and the former cannot function independently. The crucial in teaching and learning is decentering from their own culture (Byram 1989), which requires not only exposure to culture, but special skills to understand and interpret various experiences. The term *decentering* (Byram 1989) has been coined to describe decentering from one's own language and culture and decentering in the process of teaching and learning. Kramsch & Whiteside (2008: 664) use the term *symbolic competence* to describe "the ability not only to approximate or appropriate for oneself someone else's language, but to shape the very context in which the language is learned and shaped". Overall, this competence involves understanding the complexity of language and ways of thinking and the need for multiple perspectives.

Liddicoat & Scarino, (2013: 56-59, 175-176) identify five principles of teaching and learning languages from an intercultural perspective: *active construction*, *making connections*, *social interaction*, *reflection* and also *responsibility*. They are considered preconditions and principles that underlie the intercultural perspective of language learning.

The first principle, *active construction*, acknowledges that learning evolves from active engagement in creating meaning and interpreting through interaction with others. Moreover, it involves continuous reflection on one's self and other people. It is a process that involves not only absorbing knowledge, but also continuous

thinking and changing. For teachers it means that they need to provide students with opportunities to explore their interpretations, and to enable meaning-making in various contexts.

Making connections is the second principle that refers to the need for connecting new language and culture to the knowledge that students already possess. That is why the starting point should be articulating the intracultural experiences of the students as a first interpretative position. Learning encompasses making sense of the positions and associating others' intracultural positions to one's own in order to establish the complexity of interrelations between similarities and differences.

Social interaction is the principle that draws our attention to the fact that learning and communication are interactive and social, and people engage in negotiating meaning both inside and beyond the classroom. The learner should be in dialogue with various ways of communicating, thus being always a language user.

Reflection is a fundamental principle that concentrates on interpreting both affectively and cognitively facts. It is cognitive because learners focus on exploration of assumptions that one encounters and brings to the communication and reflect critically on them. On the other hand it is affective due to the fact that every encounter triggers diverse emotional responses that may include dissonance for the individual, but fundamentally it affects how people see the world. Zarate (1993) labeled the process of engagement as a form of rereading of experience, which offers more insights, the capacity to see new connections, multiple possible interpretations or alternate perspectives.

Responsibility focuses on the dependence on the learner's attitudes and values and accepting responsibility for one's interactions with others to better understand self and others. This position is ethical as it imposes obligations on the intercultural speaker to develop intercultural sensitivity and understanding and act interculturally, i.e. respectfully towards others.

Liddicoat & Scarino (2013: 60) propose a learning-oriented view of the practice of intercultural language teaching and learning (see Figure 1). The processes are interrelated and do not have to start at a given point, however, this is a noticing process that is fundamental, as it is a focal point in intercultural use beyond the classroom. When students notice something in their previous experiences in learning a language, they can compare it to their background culture and reflect on it. The view highlights the importance of active engagement with diversity in the context of interaction. Those multiple dimensions of interaction enable learners to articulate their reflections, negotiate meaning and understand phenomena from diverse perspectives. This view emphasizes non-linear, co-present processes and a cyclical nature of learning.

The pedagogical implications for the abovementioned principles involve designing tasks to broaden their focus and incorporate language use and meaning. The notion of tasks should relate to the nature of interaction which is mutual interpretation and creation of meaning. Interactions for learners become experiences

and enable them to develop understanding of what communication entails. Intercultural perspective in learning becomes an opportunity to exchange meanings, to discover and construct knowledge. It includes an experiential dimension which means transforming understanding of the subject matter, language and culture. Tasks also enable learners to engage actively with the interpretation of self and other.

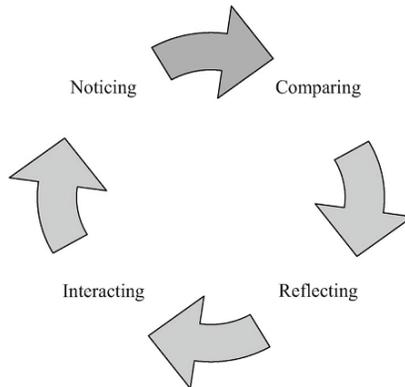


Figure 1. Interacting processes of intercultural learning.

Developing intercultural competence is a lifelong process and it cannot be acquired in a short time. However, proposals for teachers have been made of how to combine language learning with cultural competence development. The proposal of Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) is a comprehensive approach that enables teachers to include intercultural orientation into their teaching. It is appropriate for future lawyers as it develops their understanding of what the key aspects of communication are. Moreover, it develops their ability to perceive differences and negotiate meaning. It also develops culture-sensitive knowledge and skills that are crucial for lawyers, such as, understanding and respecting other worldview, reconciling the conflicting interests, and communication adaptability.

CONCLUSIONS

Effective communication entails taking into consideration needs and values of interactants, which often leads to questioning preconceived ideas about your own culture and the other one. It implies that the intercultural approach to the process of language learning should be implemented as non-linguistic needs become equally important for students and future workers in the modern world. That is why practical applications for various learners, including future lawyers, should be proposed and implemented in order to prepare learners for the demands and challenges of

increasingly global workplace. This workplace requires a set of skills that should be developed in the process of education, and developing intercultural competence should constitute an integral part of language teaching and learning.

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