

CULTURAL COMPETENCE AS A COMPONENT OF LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

Magdaléna Bilá

Abstract: The aim of the presented paper is, in the light of ideas contained in new models of culture pedagogy, to reconsider the contents of the courses included in the study program *English in international cultural and business practice* (currently run by the English language and literature department, Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences, the University of Prešov, Slovakia) and provide suggestions for teaching methods.

Key words: culture pedagogy, intercultural education, cultural competence, social network, intertextuality, language-culture relationship, languaculture

Introduction

The aim of the presented paper is, in the light of ideas contained in new models of culture pedagogy, to reconsider the contents of the courses included in the study program *English in international cultural and business practice* (currently run by the English language and literature department, Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences, the University of Prešov, Slovakia) and provide suggestions for teaching methods.

The general objectives of the program in question are defined in relation to what knowledge and skills a graduate is expected to manifest.

- Regarding the language skills, a graduate is expected to have a command of English at B2 level of the Common European Framework and manifest skills in translating and interpreting texts (dealing with cultural and business contents) from English into Slovak and vice versa;
- Regarding intercultural competence, a graduate is expected to be able to engage in intercultural communication on an array of topics and in a variety of social contexts.

Internationalization and ever-increasing multiculturalism (plurality of cultures) appear inescapable in each segment of social life and hence it is necessary to educate future generation so that they may be able to interact with other cultures and embrace cultural diversity. Thus, the program in question was introduced as a response based on the local government officials' and small and medium enterprises needs analysis.

1 Defining Culture and its Relationship to Language

2.1 The concept of culture

Culture is an inherent part of humankind and serves as a means through which experience (knowledge, skills, values and norms) is passed onto future generations. Experts view it as both a conscious process of selecting what the new generation chooses to acquire and an unconscious process of imitating the norms and patterns of behavior. This is an inevitable aspect in the development of humankind (Mistrík, 1999: 29).

Gudykunst views culture from a holistic perspective and relates it to the social activities of a human being from a spiritual and material point of view. In addition, in his treatment, the concept of culture encompasses human accomplishments and achievements in art, religion, science and technology (2003: 23).

Crozet and Liddicoat (Crozet & Liddicoat, 2000: 22; In: Risager, 2007: 156) combine a holistic conception with a dynamic and contextual aspect:

“Culture is a concept referring to ways of acting, believing, valuing and thinking which are shared by members of a community (social group) and which are transmitted to the next generation. A culture is dynamic and open to change as a result of a change in living conditions or through contact with other cultures”.

Another definition by Peoples and Bailey as adapted by Mistrík is as follows: “Culture is the socially passed knowledge of a certain group” (Mistrík, 1999: 25). It stresses an active interaction between a human being and other human beings, on the one hand, and human beings and the environment, on the other hand, as a result of which there is a continuous modification and change of both humans and their environment. Thus, a human being is viewed upon both as a producer and a product of a certain culture.

Kačmárová (2008: 61) understands the concept of culture in a broad sense, i.e. “culture as a representation of a national, ethnic, or religious background shared by people residing in a particular country” and a narrower sense – as culture representing the language itself” (compare with Risager’s concept of languaculture given below).

2.2 Relationship between language and culture

2.2.1 Approaches to the language-culture relationship

Since cultures spread across languages and likewise languages spread across cultures (Risager, 2007: 153), for many years, authorities have been engaged in exploring the relationship between the two entities and have concluded that the study of a language cannot be separated from culture studies and vice versa. “*When (language) is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways*” (Kramsch, 1983: 3; In: Chang, 2003: 25).

The treatment of the language-culture relationship can be viewed upon as a continuum ranging from a radical one drawing on the strong national-romantic current since the late 18th century which maintained the identity of the two entities to a moderate form (drawing on classic structuralist treatment of language as an autonomous system) which “*deprives language of its culture-bearing potential*” (Risager, 2007: 166).

Nobody would nowadays raise doubts regarding the idea that there is a close relationship between language and culture and, consequently, that language teaching ought to encompass cultural issues. It is necessary, however, to reconsider culture pedagogy with regard to the impact of globalization and to the new modes of communication resulting from it. Thus, the new approach in culture pedagogy combines *social network theory* and *studies of intertextuality* (Risager, 2007). The social network theory views social relationships between human beings as nodes and ties; nodes being the entities within the networks and ties being the relationships between them. Through a social network *intertextual chains* (a news item retold to another person who may further write about it in an e-mail, etc.) are created, and through them ideas, values and attitudes may spread between individuals and likewise between institutions in a variety of discourses and genres. Thus, the contemporary world is beyond doubt a “global village” in which state boundaries do not obstruct global communication, and, consequently, languages have ceased to be confined to restricted territories (compare also Risager, 2007: 168).

The relationship between language and culture varies according to the point of departure. In a generic sense, language and culture (Risager, 2007: 186-187; Chang, 2003: 26-27) are always inseparable for culture is a system of symbols and language is one such system in the network. In addition, language use is always confined to a cultural context (the interpretation of language codes results from the social and cultural semantic systems). From the sociological perspective, language and culture are two discrete entities since language use spreads along social networks and a variety of cultural contexts. From the psychological point of view, however, language and culture have always developed together in the individual subject in a unique amalgam. From the system-oriented point of view, however, Risager (2007: 186 – 187) emphasizes, the two entities are separable (culture as “construction of construction”).

Risager attempts to neutralize the traditional language-culture dichotomy by introducing certain concepts that link the two conceptions, especially *linguaculture* and *discourse* (Risager, 2007: 153).

Risager (2007: 153) views the concept of *linguaculture* (introduced by the American linguistic anthropologist Michael Agar) as a bridge between the structure of the language and the socially determined personal idiolect (Risager, 2007: 171 – 172) and relates it to three dimensions of language: *sociological, psychological, and systemic*. When an utterance/text is produced, it contains linguacultural intentions, i.e. semantic and pragmatic functioning of the utterance in the given situation.

Regarding L2 speakers, their linguacultures (semantic connotations, etc.) also are rooted in their L1; thus, language acquisition is a specific process resulting in truly personal linguistic resources that are not devoid of personal cultural experience, which results in specific understanding and interpretation of the world. Linguaculture in the linguistic system is regarded by Risager (2007) as a discursive superstructure on the linguistic system, a continuum ranging from semantic and pragmatic potential (denotative aspect accounted for in dictionaries) to encyclopedic information.

The relationship between language and culture when the language in question is a foreign language, researchers stress, is specific due to the interplay of L1 and L2 languages and linguacultures. Due to L1 interference learners develop an amalgam of their L1 and L2 languages/linguacultures (interlanguage) despite their awareness of some semantic and pragmatic distinctions between their L1 and L2. Even highly competent L2 speakers are reported to manifest traces of what Risager regards as their L1 linguaculture.

Discourse is a concept connecting language/linguaculture and a broader concept of culture (context). In accordance with the social network theory (Risager, 2007), discourses flow across language communities (owing to translations, reinterpretations, etc.) in a variety of genres and may develop simultaneously and autonomously in several language communities.

Thus, on this view, the cultural treatment of language may be said to cover two levels: the level of linguaculture, linked to specific languages, and the level of discourse, not necessarily linked to any specific language, but forming a communicative event happening in a context.

2.2.2 Context

The communicative event (comprising language, linguaculture and discourse) always happens in a context. Malinowski (1945) differentiates context of utterance (in Nunan's treatment linguistic context), context of situation (variables that make up the situation) and context of culture (knowledge of the relevant features of the world, socio-cultural background of the discourse). Čermák (2001) (compare also Risager, 2007) differentiates various levels of context, from the lowest micro-level (the situational context) to the highest macro-level (the world historical context). All life in society has both social (relational aspects of activities and institutions) and cultural aspects (conveying and creating meaning).

Language use, Risager observes, can be realized in a L1 context, a foreign language context or a L2 context – or a mixture of these. Apparently, a language's linguaculture is characterized first and foremost by the historical embedding in L1 contexts. But the contexts must not be understood in purely national-territorial terms. Apart from these types of broader societal and historical context, researchers (Čermák, 2001; Risager, 2007) stress the importance of pragmatic or life contexts, which draw on the individual's personal experience with, and knowledge of, the world as well as their personal linguistic experience materialized in the form of their linguistic/linguacultural resources.

When exploring the relationship between language and culture, Risager stresses the importance of references to and representations of L1 contexts distinguishing between internal (first language contexts) and external cultural references and representations (foreign- and second-language contexts). Cultural representations, Risager points out, exhibit the textual macro-level, and may encompass cultural references. Cultural representations are embedded in discourses (images or narratives of culture and society) and they can be representations of 'culture' (selection of topics to be dealt with) in

a particular context, or representations that display a particular cultural perspective (selection of representatives of a particular culture and the texts they produced).

Conclusion

In language teaching, it is predominantly the target-language internal references and representations that are traditionally centre-stage (i.e. realia, life and institutions, historical and geographical facts about the target language culture, etc.). Drawing on more recent treatments of culture pedagogy (compare Mistrik, 1999; Risager, 2007: 236 – 238; Chang, 2003: 191 – 197) in addition to internal references and representation it is possible to outline the following suggestions for the study program *English in international cultural and business practice* (goals, course contents and methods):

1/ The ultimate goal for a L2 expert must be a native-like variety (or two in the case of English) performing as an everyday language in a language community and consequently manifested as a complex of many different “*varieties*” / *styles of language in use* in all kind of situations (related to social, regional, situational and poetical conditions).

2/ In the light of social network theory and intertextuality studies it may be concluded that the target language is not restricted geographically, in other words it is not confined to a limited territory, and spreads globally through social networks and various channels of transnational migration and communication. Thus, L2 users of English have outnumbered L1 users and it is highly probable that graduates will have more encounters and interactions with other L2 users of English. Therefore, it is advisable to have the students benefit from exposure to a wide range of other L2 varieties of English as well as non-native like varieties. Students’ oral communication should be practiced in such a manner so that they may explore a diversity of contexts (L1, EFL, L2 and a mixture of these as well).

3/ In addition, students ought to explore texts containing cultural references (both external and internal) and cultural representations. Since, from a psychological point of view, language and culture are inseparable entities and language users incorporate culture in linguistic resources, it is necessary to develop the ability and skill “*to mediate between the two languages/ languacultures and the ability to reflect on issues in connection with this*” (Risager, 2007: 237). This can be achieved through exploration and analysis of a variety of texts (both literary and non-literary), through translating and interpreting them in real or realistic situations. In this respect, authorities claim, students will benefit from having a bilingual teacher who will help them develop schemata necessary for interpretation and understanding of the target language texts and incorporate them into their own languaculture. Therefore, the use of students’ L1 ought not to be shunned; it ought to be encouraged.

4/ “*Apart from communicative linguistic competence, the goals of intercultural education contain both knowledge about culture and society, attitudes to culture and society, and non-linguistic skills as well as political awareness and a critical cultural awareness*” (Risager, 2007: 157). In addition to texts containing external and internal cultural references, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the target language does not correlate with definite discourses and topics although there are certain topics that may persist in a certain culture community. Thus, the teacher is free and justified to provide the students with a wide selection of topics and genres. In addition, through several manners of communication – student and text, student and teacher, teacher and text, student and student – several languacultures will interplay, which will broaden their horizons and enrich their own languacultures.

5/ What is more, if language-based, learner-centered, activity-based and process-oriented approaches are applied (Chang, 2003: 191), more responsibility will be put on learners, which will enhance their active participation, involvement, motivation, independence and responsibility for their own learning. In such a manner, students will actively and consciously participate in global communication and engage in intertextuality, which in return may increase their awareness of the richness of languacultures and enhance their cultural competence.

References

- Čermák, F. (2001), *Jazyk a jazykověda / Language and Linguistics*. Praha: Karolinum.
- Chang, Z. (2003), *Comparative Studies in Language & Culture*, Beijing: China Ocean University Press.
- Gudykunst, W. B. (2003), *Cross-cultural and intercultural communication*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage publications, Inc.
- Kačmárová, A. (2008), Intercultural Communication from a Slovak Speaker's View, In: *Discourse and Interaction* 1/1, pp 61 – 72.
- Mistrík, E., Haapanen, S., Heikkinen, H., Jazudek, R., Ondrušková, N. (1999), *Kultúra a multikultúrna výchova / Culture and multicultural Education*, Bratislava: IRIS
- Malinowski, B. (1945), *The Dynamics of Culture Change*, available at <http://www.archive.org/details/dynamicsofcultur031784mbp>, retrieved: 20 June, 2009
- Nunan, D. (2007), *Applied Linguistics Discourse Analysis*, London: Penguin books.
- Risager, K. (2005), Languaculture as a Key Concept in Language and Culture Teaching, In: *The Consequences of Mobility*, Eds. Bent Preisler, Anne Fabricius, Hartmut Haberland, Susanne Kjærbaek, and Karen Risager, Roskilde: Roskilde University, pp 185 – 196.
- Risager, K. (2007), *Language and Culture Pedagogy. From a National to a transnational Paradigm*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Author

Doc. PhDr. Magdaléna Bilá, PhD., Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences, Prešov University in Prešov, Slovakia, email: magduska_bila@yahoo.com