

TEACHING CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

This paper is devoted to one of the aspects of teaching English as a means of intercultural communication: teaching culture as a set of communicative skills based on a system of values. Behind any textbook there is not just methodology, not a mere set of assignments, but a specific set of ideological and psychological implications, expressed in different communicative tasks, which correspond to modern paradigm of teaching.

According to *the Bologna Declaration* [1999], new ideologies and policies of higher education prevail now, as the importance of education and educational cooperation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount. The European Union stresses the need for educating a future 'labour force' that 'possesses' adequate intercultural competencies. The university is responsible for providing students with the information, knowledge and skills they need to compete in a complex international market. Thus, higher education in general and intercultural education in particular is becoming an increasingly valuable global commodity [Stier 2006].

Modern principles of teaching methodology have been thoroughly worked out and present a globally accepted unified approach with fundamental theoretical background. The process of teaching and learning English as a second language depends on the criteria and requirements expressed in *the Bologna Declaration*.

It is extremely important for a teacher of English to be aware of the fact, that teaching language means teaching culture. Although culture issues are not necessarily discussed explicitly in textbooks, teachers should be able to identify the aspects of culture being taught. Besides, as language is a part of culture and communication depends on both language and cultural values and norms, the process of teaching culture should be recognized as an intrinsic part of every English class.

The necessity for sharing common values by citizens of the European Union are stated in the Bologna Declaration as one of the main principles of life in modern Europe and, therefore, cannot be ignored by authors of textbooks and teachers using new textbooks:

A Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the necessary competences to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space [The Bologna Declaration 1999].

As far as the approach to teaching languages is concerned, it has tremendously changed recently. Orientation to competences has made communicative aspect of teaching English more challenging. There are more opportunities now for students to apply communicative skills. Traditionally the list of Natural communication domains providing intercultural encounters included international professional contacts, business, trade, exchange programmes, studies abroad, traveling, migration, and war [Леонтович 2002]. Another important domain can be added now: the Internet.

While a language class is an artificial situation which allows students to simulate different communicative situations and patterns, they face there difficulties, corresponding to breakdowns in real cross-cultural encounters. These problems prevent from understanding and are caused by the same factors that impede intercultural communication.

Factors, affecting understanding in communication, are as follows: topic, differences in alphabets (graphic level), pronunciation differences (phonetic level), morphology, syntactic structures, vocabulary, non-verbal means of communication [Гришаева, Цурикова 2003; Леонтович 2003]. Thus, studying English a student and a teacher not only have to cope with both linguistic and cultural differences, but, moreover, they have to recognize globally stated ideological implications and norms of behaviour, and follow these guidelines.

It is widely accepted that the focus of teaching English now is on situations emphasizing intercultural aspect of interaction. The concept of Little 'c' has become more important than general knowledge of some cultural facts, i.e. Big 'C':

The 'big C' elements of British and American culture are history, geography, institutions, literature, art, and music. 'Little c' elements form the way of life in some particular country, include culturally influenced beliefs and perceptions, especially as expressed through language [Tomalin, Stempleski 1993].

Dealing with values and attitudes teachers influence the views of students, therefore a teacher of English should be aware of the ideas and theories which predetermine the choice of material and its treatment in a textbook.

The necessity of studying culture alongside with language was explicitly stated in the 1990s and textbooks in general and professional English presented a wide variety of exercises and texts about cultural differences. At that time the term 'cultural awareness' was widely spread. Since then the main task of a teacher of English has become raising cultural awareness of students.

The grounds for teaching cultural issues had been formed some time before, when components of intercultural communication were identified: they were regarded universal for both intracultural communication and intercultural communication, the difference between them lies in ideological contexts.

Till the end of the 20th century the main types of culturally-oriented tasks in textbooks of English had been to find out culture differences, to study the correct treatment of stereotypes, and to use generalizations discussing cultures.

This approach was widely used, involving students to find some solutions for the cases of cultural misunderstanding and raising cultural awareness.

Now the importance of communicative competence is being stated and it is regarded alongside with linguistic and cross-culture competences. While communicative competence means awareness of the communicative context for linguistic units and patterns of behaviour, cross-cultural competence is a positive attitude to different ethnic groups. It means that teachers are supposed to teach attitudes and values through language and communicative patterns.

In [Tomalin, Stempleski 2003] seven goals of cultural instruction are described. They are:

1. To help students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviors.

2. To help students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave.

3. To help students to become more aware of conventional behavior in common situations in the target culture.

4. To help students to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language.

5. To help students to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence.

6. To help students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture.

7. To stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.

It is worth noting that since the end of the XX century tolerance has become a key notion in teaching English alongside with awareness.

The main shift between former ideas in cross-cultural studies and modern views on intercultural communication is the shift from the discussion of ethnic differences and negative treatment of experiencing diversity to understanding that all people are different, even within one culture, and it is a norm.

Every day each person has to deal with several intercultural situations because everybody has some particular identity and mode of behaviour. So, culture can be regarded at several levels and its interpretation will be different: ethnic culture, corporate or institutional or organizational culture, individual cultures based on age, gender, status peculiarities, etc. [Dignen 2011].

We are all people and culture differences just add something to our identity. Modern textbooks include material about emotions and psychological aspects of life, as well as about universally accepted norms and values. So teachers of English face a new challenge: to make students know that people have individual communicative styles, rather than behaviours formed by ethnic cultures.

Effective communication means awareness, tolerance and sensitivity. These are three basic values of cultural competence which are supposed to be taught in every English class. Bob Dignen includes sensitivity into the list of virtues defining intercultural competence. According to the author of *Communicating across Cultures* modern understanding of intercultural competence defines it as a complex notion, which includes:

1. Having a strong interest in meeting new people from different and unfamiliar cultural backgrounds.
2. Learning about different cultures, observing and reflecting.
3. Being flexible and easy adaptation to different social and cultural situations.
4. Dealing with uncertainty, looking for change and new challenges in life.
5. Understanding the opinion of others about oneself, being sensitive to the interpretation of one's own communication style [Dignen 2011].

The term 'cultural sensitivity' is connected to the notion of 'flexible thinking'. Flexible thinking stops people judging others' behaviours negatively too quickly. It makes people more open and interact more positively with each other [Storti 2007]. Consequently, students are to be taught to observe the situation carefully and interpret it from different perspectives, to be culturally sensitive and to be able to prevent misunderstanding acting positively.

A teacher of English should be an instructor in understanding of the modern world, its generally accepted values and attitudes, the ways and laws of communication in it. A teacher should be able to identify the goals of instruction, recognize the benefits of cultural competence and teach strategies providing effective communication.

The benefits of teaching culture in the English classroom are numerous: cultural competence raises self-awareness, builds confidence, breaks down barriers, builds trust, motivates, opens horizons, develops sensitivity and empathy in people, makes people good communicators, enhances people's employment opportunities [Quintessential].

In modern textbooks of English there are numerous cultural tips, recipes of communicative success, reflecting the new system of communicative values in intercultural communication. The most interesting examples are from the book by B. Dignen: 'Adapt your small-talk style to the other person to make them feel comfortable. Choose topics which interest the other person and ask questions which motivate others to talk' [Dignen 2011: 13]. Another example: 'Always try to communicate to others in a way which they will understand as polite, respectful and positive. In addition, do not judge others too quickly when they communicate in a way which you see as negative. Try to find the positive message which they are trying to communicate' [Dignen 2011: 15]. In both examples the pieces of advice are aimed at teaching

cross-cultural skills, but they are applicable to communication within a native culture as well.

So, psychological issues are put forward in English textbooks. This tendency requires new skills from a teacher, for intrapersonal competence, involving cognitive and emotional skills, is now recognized in teaching culture alongside with interpersonal competence, referring to interactive skills and adequate responding to contextual meanings, i.e. situational sensitivity. These aspects of teaching directly correspond to the Bologna Declaration and new objectives of teaching, as J. Stier argues 'the Bologna Declaration assumes that internationalization of higher education may contribute to ideological convergence, a European sense of community and cultural conformity – and, consequently, to social harmony' [Stier 2006].

Summing up, it is necessary to mention that the above discussed approach to teaching English has become universally recognized and has some distinctive features. Effective communication gives a tool to success. Teachers of English are no longer dealing with vocabulary or grammar. Cultural issues, including values and attitudes, have become much more important, and their treatment is constantly changing. Teachers are regarded more as psychologists and experts, preparing good communicators for future careers. Teachers provide their students with strategies for effective cross-cultural communication. These are rules, discussed in textbooks and numerous online-courses throughout the world, as in the following example:

1. Distinguish perspectives.
2. Build self-awareness.
3. Recognize the complexity.
4. Avoid stereotyping.
5. Respect differences.
6. Listen actively.
7. Be honest.
8. Be flexible.
9. Think twice.
10. Ask questions [Ten Strategies for Effective Communication].

Thus, the concepts of cultural awareness, tolerance and cultural sensitivity convert challenges of teaching culture into reliable communication strategies.

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Cross-Cultural Communication pp 274-293 | Cite as. Teaching Cross-Cultural Communication. Authors. Authors and affiliations. In this chapter, we draw upon our wide experience of teaching cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication to UK and international students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, and of running training courses for business and diplomatic staff, briefing them for working and living overseas. We aim to provide examples of good practice and to analyse the effectiveness of different teaching methods, providing some of the tools we have found to be of value in teaching this important subject. This webinar, Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies in the English Language Classroom, will focus on ways English teachers can raise cultural and linguistic awareness so that students will become more successful English speaking, global citizens. Since our global culture started to take root, English has taken center stage in developing our abilities to communicate across cultures and borders. English is fast becoming the shared language of our global community whether it be in business, economics, education or even social media. This webinar will discuss some of the challenges our different cultural and linguistic backgrounds present in spite of a shared language. Read Susan's article Developing cross-cultural awareness in the monolingual classroom. Add new comment. Log in or register to post comments. A - Z of Content. Professional development -Teachers --Planning lessons and courses ---Articles ---Magazine ---Find other content -- Understanding learners ---Articles ---Magazine ---Find other content --Managing the lesson ---Articles ---Magazine ---Teaching reading and writing Popular. 0 Teaching English in primary school. 1 Teacher professional development through WhatsApp-based Communities of Practice in challenging contexts. 2 IATEFL YLTSIG 2020 Online Conference. 0 Blog topics for November and December 2020.