

## ***SOCIOLINGVISTIKA/ SOCIOLINGUISTICS***

### **Linguo-pragmatic Aspects of Intercultural Communicative Competence**

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**Abstract.** The article discloses our belief that intercultural communicative competence, being the quintessence of human language skills, should be cultivated and developed like the other language skills. When communicating the speaker is supposed to feel the required register of the target language and adapt it to the appropriate situation. The ways and norms of interaction form part of the invisible ritual imposed by culture on language users. This assumption might be referred also to the process of communication realised by means of translation and interpreting. The present article is supposed to be of a descriptive type. This is not an attempt to depict an experiment carried out to impress the reader. We would rather like to share our experience obtained by means of a routine educational research based on relevant theory studies and supported by samples of daily academic practice in language education.

The research performed has proved to the fact that the linguo-pragmatic aspects of language users' intercultural communicative competence can be developed by means of translation studies irrespectively of the programme the students have been enrolled in.

#### **Introduction**

The present language teaching / learning policy in Europe does not propose making all Europeans polyglots, but advises giving them the opportunity to understand one another, to listen to one another and to accept their diversity. This approach conditions also the goal of the present research. Thus our **aim is** – to provide relevant theoretical basis for exploring the language students' intercultural communicative competence, namely, the development of its linguo-pragmatic aspects and to implement the acquired ideas by means of introducing elements of translation and interpreting in language classrooms.

**The target audience** of the research in progress are students of the Faculty of Modern Languages at the University of Latvia majoring in English. They are enrolled either in academic programmes (Bachelor in English Philology and Master in English Philology) or professional programmes (Translator or / and Interpreter).

**The hypothesis** of our research is enclosed in our belief that intercultural communicative competence is the quint-essence of human language skills enabling the representatives of different cultures to use the pragmatically relevant, adequate language variation when entering the social and cultural situation of another language. Accordingly, it should be cultivated and developed like any other language skill.

**The expected result:** The target audience will feel the required register of the target language and will be able to adapt it to the pragmatically appropriate situation.

#### **Intercultural Communicative Competence**

The literature on communicative competence has been surveyed by various authors with varying emphases: Le

Page, 1975; Munby, 1978; Canale and Swain, 1980; Brumfit, 1994. There is a general agreement among applied linguists that it is necessary to specify as clearly as possible not only the formal features of linguistic systems but also the ways in which these features may legitimately be operated. Throughout the 1960s Dell Hymes (1972) explored ways in which utterances may be defined as appropriate to specific social "speech events". According to Hymes, a child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate to the context in which they are made. Thus the learner acquires communicative as well as linguistic competence:

*"He knows when and when not to speak, what to talk about with whom, when where, and in what manner" (Hymes, 1972:277).*

The concept of communicative competence acquires growing importance when it surpasses the borders of one language and leads the native speaker of L1 into L2; L3, L4 and even further into the sphere of intercultural communication. This way the previously termed communicative competence grows into intercultural communicative competence. Why and how does it happen? Do we need to know it? Why do we need this knowledge? These are the main questions that have attracted our interest.

One possible way of investigating what people actually do when communicating is to look at language variations in different social and cultural situations.

In Fairclough's view, language and society partially constitute one another. Thus, language, being a part of society, pre-conditions the fact that

*"... linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena are (in part) linguistic phenomena" (Fairclough, 1989:23).*

Hence the answer to the first question: entering the social and cultural situation of another language the speaker of L1 is to use not only the linguistic components of the new language but his / her task is also to feel the register, the status, the medium and the situation in which the language will be used. If the speaker manages to use the adequate language variation appropriate for the given social and cultural situation he / she is said to have acquired **intercultural communicative competence** or

*“... a socially and culturally organised way of speaking through which particular functions are realised” (Schiffrin, 1995:32).*

It is important to know how the intercultural communicative competence is acquired in order to co-ordinate the process of developing this competence in accordance with the linguistic competence of the target language. The speaker is supposed to feel the required register of the target language and adapt it to the appropriate situation.

Our daily lives take us through a succession of activities requiring the use of language. The activities are very diverse and have specific features of language associated with them. Many activities are connected with our job. We may be a teacher delivering a lesson in the target language, an engineer giving instructions to a workman, a lawyer advising a client, a trade union official discussing some problems with the administration, etc. Other activities are part of our leisure. We may play tennis, chess or bridge. Or relating to our home life, we may be acting as mother, father, husband, wife, son or daughter. We may look at the life of any individual and we will find that each day he / she passes through a succession of such roles, and in each he / she will produce or hear features of language that are typical of the activity involved. A careful study of the activity should enable us to establish what the exact linguistic features are those that mark each concrete role.

Such a study would be of great importance and interest in L1 – our mother tongue, but it acquires even greater importance if we add to the register study also the study of the new target culture. Hence a most interesting question, namely: **“What is the aim of the translator while exploring the intercultural communicative competence?”**

The answer to this question can be given on several levels. Let us start with the first level which will lead us back into the fairy land of our childhood where Little-Red-Riding-Hood asked the big bad wolf something like this: Granny dear, why do you have such big eyes? and the wolf answered: “To see you better, my child.” When asked the same question about his ears he said: “To hear you better, my child.” Answering the question *“Why should translators bother with the intercultural competence?”* we would like to add one more answer to the string of the big bad wolf’s answers, and namely: “To communicate better, my child.”

Hence the importance of understanding the role of culture and intercultural phenomena in communication. Etiquette, expressions of politeness, social dos and don’ts shape people’s behaviour through child rearing, behavioural upbringing, schooling, and professional training. The use of written language is also shaped and socialised through culture. Not only what it is proper to write to whom in

what circumstances, but also which text genres are appropriate (the application form, the business letter, the political pamphlet), because they are sanctioned by cultural conventions. These ways with language, or norms of interaction and interpretation, form part of the invisible ritual imposed by culture on language users. This is culture’s way of bringing order and predictability into people’s use of language.

Social conventions, norms of social appropriateness, are the product of communities of language users. According to Kramsch (2000:6)

*“Culture both liberates people from oblivion, anonymity, and the randomness of nature, and constrains them by imposing on them a structure and principles of selection.”*

People who identify themselves as members of a social group (family, neighbourhood, professional or ethnic affiliation, nation) acquire common ways of viewing the world through their interactions with other members of the same group. These views are reinforced through institutions like the family, the school, the workplace, the church, the government and other sites of socialisation throughout their lives.

Common attitudes, beliefs, and values are reflected in the way members of the group use language – for example, what they choose to say or not to say and how they say it. Thus, in addition to the notion of speech community composed of people who use the same linguistic code, we can speak of discourse communities to refer to the common ways in which members of a social group use language to meet their social needs. Not only the grammatical, lexical, and phonological features of their language (teenage talk, professional jargon, political rhetoric) differentiate them from others, but also the topics they choose to talk about the way they present information, the style with which they interact, according to Kramsch, their **discourse accent**.

These features are extremely important when oral translation (interpreting) is concerned.

Apart from that, there is another way of viewing culture – one which takes a more historical perspective. The culture of everyday practices draws on the culture of shared history and traditions.

*“People identify themselves as members of a society to the extent that they can have a place in that society’s history and that they can identify with the way it remembers its past, turns its attention to the present, and anticipates its future. Culture consists of precisely that historical dimension in a group’s identity” (Kramsch, 2000:7).*

This diachronic view of culture focuses on the way in which a social group represents itself and others through its material productions over time – its technological achievements, its monuments, its works of art, its popular culture – that punctuate the development of its historical identity. The material culture is reproduced and preserved through institutional mechanisms that are also part of the culture, like museums, schools, public libraries, government corporations, and the media. Kramsch (2000) points out that the Eiffel tower or the Mona Lisa exist as material artefacts, but they have been kept alive and given the prominence they have on the cultural market through what

artists, art collectors, poets novelists travel agents tourist guides have said and written about them. Language is not a culture-free code, distinct from the way people think and behave, but rather it plays a major role in the perpetuation of culture, particularly its printed form.

According to Kramsh (2000:10),

*“culture can be defined as membership in discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings. Even when they have left the community, its members may retain, wherever they are, a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting. These standards are what is generally called their ‘culture’.”*

When entering a multicultural communication act it is utterly important to observe and respect the various “cultures”. Members of all cultural groups need to feel respected and not impinged upon in their autonomy, pride, add self-sufficiency. They also need to be reinforced in their view of themselves as polite, considerate, respectful members of their culture.

In face-to-face verbal exchanges, the choice of orate features of speech can give the participants a feeling of joint interpersonal involvement rather than the sense of detachment or objectivity that comes with the mere transmission of factual information. Different contexts of situation and different contexts of culture call for different conversational styles. These styles are generally considered to form part of people’s cultural identities and the ability to respect these cultural identities constitute intercultural communicative competence which can be successfully developed by means of translation studies.

### Communicative Use of Translation in the Classroom

There were times when the meaning of translation was distorted by referring to it as static, grammar based language learning routine, which excluded communication.

The main objection to translation as a teaching device has been that it interposes an immediate process between the concept and the way it is expressed in the target language, thus hindering the development of the ability to think directly in the new language.

The production of an acceptable translation into the target language is for most students a means, not an end. It is a means for developing sensitivity to both: the meanings expressed in a stretch of discourse in their own language and the different linguistic mechanisms used by the two languages to convey these meanings. Thus students learn to translate ideas, not words.

According to Nadstoga (1989),

*“... through a comparative examination of the syntactic and semantic systems of the target and native languages and the cultural contexts, in which they operate, students attempt to expand their own potential for expression in the target language” (Nadstoga, 1989:303).*

A class period leading to translation assignment may be devoted to a discussion of the text. Students should begin by looking at certain basic stylistic factors that are likely to affect the whole translation (Rivers and Temperley, 1978). The latter may include:

- the mode of discourse presented by the passage (considering how the features of the text are renderable in the native language of the student);
- the overall meaning of the passage in its context in a larger discourse;
- the tone of the passage;
- the overall structure of the passage;
- lexical items and their semantic content;
- referential and / or emotive meanings of original expressions and their equivalents in the proposed translation;
- cultural items in the source text that need to be re-thought in relation to the cultural concepts of the students’ native language.

It is undeniable that a translation assignment of this type is not an easy task for a language learner. However students will not be discouraged if their assignments are graded in difficulty and thus will help them to acquire the intercultural communicative competence gradually. Carefully selected passages will allow the student to focus on a few specific linguistic and / or cultural aspects only. Group preparation of the students’ assignment will help them to derive considerable benefit from the pooling of ideas and will reduce the difficulty of the task.

### Translation at University Level

Discussing the importance of translation at university level, it is possible to single out at least three different academic programmes including translation as an indispensable component aimed at developing the learners’ language proficiency:

- a professional programme aimed at translator and / or interpreter training;
- courses included in BA or MA programmes in Humanities (English Philology) as electives which help to enrich the students’ intercultural communicative competence ;
- ESP courses (courses of English included in BA and / or MA programmes in Social or Natural Sciences).

At this point it is very important to clarify what translation entails.

*“Translation is the act of replacing text material in the source language by an equivalent text material in the target language, where not only superficial semantic equivalents are sought, but also a maximum of implied meanings and emotional and aesthetic effects are translated” (Catford, 1965:17).*

The end product of translation is the result of a series of phases that the translator undergoes consciously or unconsciously and more or less intricately according to the factors such as the characteristics of the original text to be translated, the translator’s intellectual and material resources, the source and the target language involved, the purpose of the translation, and other, basically external, influences, such as time and physical or emotional conditions for the task.

*“The basic process remains the same: an author has transmitted his message via a certain code to a receptor, who is the translator, i.e., the new author, who will transmit*

*the same message via a different code to other receptors – readers” (Newmark, 1981: 32).*

At least two phases are clear in the translator’s task: his deciphering of the original author’s message as a receptor and his encoding of this message for other receptors. Besides these two clearly distinct phases some other correlated steps are involved.

Decoding a text is more than just disclosing the story it tells. It means identifying the text objective, its social function and its cultural message.

Decoding a text means analysing the style of the original text – the literary style, the register used, the author’s peculiar use of the language, the dialect chosen, and the linguistic forms adopted.

As it has been mentioned above, identifying the cultural phenomena involved in the text is also an important part of the decoding phase. The cultural element includes traces of national, local, ethnic, or epochal features which must be picked up by the translator.

In order to reach a global and detailed understanding of the text, this first phase may include some parallel activities such as vocabulary study and research for background information on historical data, scientific facts or literary knowledge, which will elucidate the exact details in the original text.

The next phase is the encoding of the total message into the target language. Considering the factors identified in the decoding phase,

*“...the translator must encipher into correct language not only the informative content but also the emotional and cultural traits of the original communication. In this phase it is the translator’s duty to respect the characteristics of the target language, adapt the social and cultural nuances whenever necessary, and transfer the original mood created by the source language text in order to produce as similar as possible effect on the reader” (Becher Costa, 1989:24).*

As part of this phase the translator will perform research to find the precise terminology as well as pragmatically semantic equivalents necessary to re-create the author’s product. The linguistic research will be accompanied by profound studies of both: the source and the target culture aimed at developing the translator’s intercultural communicative competence. Translation being an act of intercultural communication is impossible without an adequately developed competence of the interlocutors.

## Conclusions

At the present stage of the research we can conclude that if properly applied translation and interpreting can advance the language students' intercultural communicative competence by means of exerting positive influence on the development of its linguo-pragmatic aspects. **As a result of the theoretical studies performed and the practical activities carried out the students feel the required register of the target**

**language and are able to adapt it to the pragmatically appropriate situation.**

Communicative competence – the ability to know when and when not to speak, what to talk about with whom, when, where, and in what manner – is an indispensable precondition for a successful adequate interpreting (oral translation).

**Intercultural communicative competence demands the translator’s ability to preserve his / her own cultural identity, at the same time recognising and showing respect to other cultures, identical with or different from his / her culture.** In order to be able to act as a bridge linking different languages and different cultures in an intercultural community it is indispensable for the translator and / or interpreter to develop intercultural communicative competence.

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## **Tarpkultūrinės komunikacinės kompetencijos kalbinis pragmatinis aspektas**

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje aptariamas požiūris, nurodantis, kad tarpkultūrinė komunikacinė kompetencija, esanti žmogaus kalbos įgūdžių kvintesencija, turėtų būti įgyjama ir vystoma kaip ir kiti kalbos įgūdžiai. Bendraujant iš kalbėtojo yra laukiama, kad jis jaustų reikiamą tikslinės kalbos funkcinių stilių ir jų pritaikytų tam tikroje situacijoje. Kultūra kalbos vartotojams primeta dalį nematomo ritualo, kurį formuoja sąveikos būdai ir normos. Šią prielaidą būtų galima taikyti ir tokio komunikavimo proceso metu, kai atliekamas vertimas žodžiu ir raštu. Šis straipsnis yra aprašomojo pobūdžio. Juo nesiekama padaryti skaitytojui išpūdžio pateikiant eksperimentą. Labiau norima pasidalinti autorės patyrimu, kuris įgytas įprastomis mokymo proceso tyrimo priemonėmis, pagrįstomis tam tikra studijų teorija ir iliustruojamas kasdieninės akademinės kalbos mokymo pavyzdžiais.

Atlikto tyrimo metu buvo patvirtinta nuomonė, kad kalbinė pragmatinė kalbos vartotojo tarpkultūrinė komunikacinė kompetencija gali būti vystoma vertimo studijų priemonėmis nepriklausomai nuo studentų studijų programos.

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