Cultural Competence and Intercultural Communication on the Ground of Contemporary Glottodidactics

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ABSTRACT: This paper's subject is the reflection on the cultural problems on the grounds of the modern glottodidactics, including the current issues of the intercultural approach to the teaching of foreign languages with putting the emphasis on the important place and significant role of the intercultural competence among the objectives of the language teaching, as well as emphasizing the mutual relationship between the communication competence and intercultural competence. The authors aimed at presenting the theoretical conditions and characterising the concepts forming the basis for the practical solutions of the intercultural education and accentuating the function of glottodidactics consisting in familiarization of the culture of the target language and making the students aware of the cultural differences to shape the cultural competence and develop the intercultural communication.

Keywords: glottodidactics, teaching of foreign languages, cultural competence, intercultural communication

I. INTRODUCTION

The starting point of the discussion on the cultural competence and intercultural communication should be the analysis of the development of methodical views, where one has to notice a few turning-points concerning the goals of language teaching and their significant influence on perception of the essence of contemporary teaching and learning of a foreign language.

The first of them was establishing that the sub-systems of language are not the primary objective of the foreign language didactics, but language skills are. The other was taking notice of the functionality of a language, hence pointing out that through a given statement we realise particular language activities which, within the framework of a discussion, can occur in various configurations, usually in some subordinate dependencies in relation to dominating language activity, hence adopting the communication competence as the leading term. The third one was emphasizing the link between language and culture, and complementing the communication process with the variation of terms, norms and behaviours deriving from the cultural distinctness of the participants of this process allowing finding oneself in the communication situation with a representative of a different culture (Myczko, 2005: 25).

Culture – language relationship and its implications in the didactic process

Without any doubt, perceiving interculturalism in foreign language teaching has a specific dimension resulting from close relationship between language and culture, because it constitutes the system serving the orientation and identification within a given society which influences perception, thinking, valuation and activities of the representatives of this society.

Janusz Anusiewicz (1994: 3) defines culture as a "set of defined categories distinguished and singled out in the objective reality and, at the same time as a collection of behaviours and social attitudes connected with recognizing specific systems of values"; language, however, is defined as "the source of [the culture's] content which it enhances and conveys". Franciszek Grucza (1992: 40) indicates that "culture is an obligatory ingredient of each human person, every human community; each man – as a human – has their nature and culture at the same time".

In the scholastic discourse on the issues regarding the civilization, culture and custom there is a strong emphasis of the value of a language as their most meaningful representation, providing the widest and most profound picture. What is more, it is assumed that the importance of language for the above mentioned issues is so big that culture without a language would merely be a hypothetical phenomenon (Polok, 2006: 42). The thesis regarding the language as one of the most important links of the human world raises no doubts, too. All this makes language a subject of research lead by many scientific branches and domains including even philosophy or computer sciences, transforming them into linguistic – logical domain, researching the study of

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language (Gajda, 2010: 70). In line with these theories and the model of the linguistic reality presented by Stanisław Gajda (2010: 71), the language acts as an intermediary in the "realization of mankind's needs and desires".

It should be emphasized that until recently, the glottodidactics itself (Dakowska, 1994; Dakowska, 2002; Grucza, 1974; Grucza, 1976; Grucza, 1979; Grucza, 1985) has failed to recognize the need of large scale introduction of the study of another society's culture into the process of teaching the language used by this culture. As Grucza remarks: (Grucza, 1992: 58): "As for the cultural factors [...] they have not been recently recognized as a subject of the exercises, not to mention the regular practice. Mostly, they are individually mentioned and serve only illustrative purpose". Hence, these words confirm the (r)evolution of the relationship between language and culture that happened in the field of glottodidactics which is observed in the contemporary times. This is corroborated by Weronika Wilczyńska (2005: 16) who makes the following observation in her paper: "in the period between the world wars 1 and 2 and in 1950's commanding a foreign language served the purpose of knowing the so-called high-culture [...]. Currently, with mass tourism and international contacts, more emphasis is put on the personal functioning within the intercultural daily contacts". Today, it is hard to question the assumption that the cultural content conveyed in the process of learning a foreign language should be wide enough to allow other users of a language (from beyond a given cultural and language area) an efficient usage of the language and the ability to find oneself in the reality of a given society, including other spheres of life than those connected with art or religion. Quoting Grucza: "Glottodidactics should be mostly interested in the daily, common culture rather than in the high, Sunday-festive culture" (Grucza, 1992: 63).

Currently, these notions have been clearly depicted in reality, since the modification of the approach to culture and realities studies in the didactics of foreign languages resulted in connecting the teaching of a language with the presentation of the cultural background of a given linguistic area, mostly by increasing the exposure to the daily culture which, to a large extent, limited the domination of the "high culture" (Lewicka, 2013: 150). Also, the need of introducing the reform of the objectives of the linguistic education was noticed. Thus, teaching a foreign language should include the content of socio-linguistic and socio-cultural character (the first turning point regarding the objectives of linguistic education and their significant influence on perceiving the essence of contemporary teaching and learning the foreign language was the determination of fact that the sub-systems of a language do not constitute the key objective for the didactics of a foreign language, but the language skills do; the second one was highlighting the functionality of a language, hence assuming the communicative competence as a key notion; the third turning point constituted in emphasizing the connection between a language and culture, resulting in completing the communication process with the variety of terms, norms and behaviours originating from the cultural diversity of the parties engaged in the process, allowing them to find each other in a communication with a representative of a different culture) Wilczyńska, should be based on broadly defined "specific meta-cultural awareness", "(inter)cultural sensitivity" and "the skill of intercultural mediation" (Wilczyńska, 2005: 22).

(Inter)cultural competence (Bandura, 2000: 11-23; Bandura, 2001: 191-196; Łyp-Bielecka, 2005: 63-70; Mackiewicz, 2005: 55-62; Myczko, 2005: 27-35; Torenc, 2007: 145-197; Żylińska, 2003: 49-62) is sometimes defined as communicative or pragmatic competence, also known as strategic competence (Siek-Piskozub, 2014: 23-40). The assumption of this competence consists in "the knowledge of the forms of verbal behaviour meeting the expectations of a given communication community resulting from the socio-cultural awareness and knowledge of the world and using them in a manner that corresponds the intentions of the sender maintaining the good manners at the same time" (Zawadzka, 1992: 97). The above derives from the fact that each society creates their own patterns of conduct and reaction which *non native speaker* is to ingest, in order to efficiently communicate with the native speakers of a given language, avoiding at the same time the mistakes of a socio-cultural character. Glottodidactics emphasizes the meaning of the knowledge of the so called "safety island" or "routine forms" that is the models regulating the functioning of people in a given community. Such models constitute an essential element of the knowledge of each learner of a language (for example: polite expressions, etc.).

In Poland the issues of teaching the realities and culture within the didactics of foreign languages raised the interest only in 1970's when the communicative approach appeared and the discussion on the realities studies in glottodidactics was started. The first symposium on the role and place of the realities studies in foreign language teaching took place in 1977 in Zielona Góra. Providing the foreigners with the knowledge regarding the culture, history and customs of a given linguistic area has nearly always been a part of language teaching process, however, in the earlier papers and coursebooks on methodology the issues concerning the realities and culture had not been present to such an extent and in such a way as can be seen since mid 1990's. These issues received the widest coverage on national scientific conferences such as: "Dydaktyka języków obcych a kompetencja kulturowa i komunikacja interkulturowa (The didactics of foreign languages versus cultural competence and intercultural communication" (Poznań 2004) and "Kompetencja interkulturowa w teorii

i praktyce edukacyjnej (Intercultural competence in educational theory and practice)" (Poznań 2010) resulting in publications under the corresponding titles edited by Maciej Mackiewicz (2005, 2010).

The intercultural approach which has been promoted since mid 1980's placed in the foreground the acquisition of (inter)cultural competence which can be defined as "a complex of analytical and strategic skills used in relationships with the representatives of other nations" (Zawadzka, 2000), since "through the knowledge of other cultures and culturally conditioned forms of behaviour, by their un-biased analysis, the intercultural competence allows becoming aware of the culturally conditioned individuality, the change of the existing attitudes and thus widens the possibility of the interpretation and actions performed by a given person" (Zawadzka, 2000). The new approach emphasizes the close connection between the language and culture, the combination of linguistic and psychological skills including the awareness of the existence of various actions and communication behaviours resulting from the affiliation with various cultural circles, the ability to acquire and use the strategy of distinguishing the meanings on the basis of a context and the analysis of possible misunderstandings in the communication. It also includes the ability to identify various communication styles and, in the first place, the readiness to become involved in the culturally foreign perspectives, in other words becoming sensitive to socio-cultural issues. The characteristic features of the intercultural approach to the realities and culture include culturally conditioned improvement of the communication skills, attempt to liberate oneself from the stereotypical perception of foreign cultures, drawing the attention to the existence of various, culturally conditioned interpretation of words and behaviour.

The role and the meaning of the cultural competence in the process of acquiring a foreign language are expressed in the following quotes:

If someone wants to learn a foreign language they do it in order to receive and send messages of various types. Since each language is – what was emphasized earlier – an illustration of a culture which it represents, the command of a language will always be accompanied by parallel knowledge of the cultural phenomena defined and described by a given language. Hence, a process of creating the cultural identity must take place [...] which means that *de facto* it is impossible to learn a foreign language well without basing it on the cultural barrier (Polok, 2006: 62);

Language, as a social creation, is an inseparable part of the civilization and culture of a given society. It reflects the differences in the perception of the realities beyond the language as well as patterns and standards of behaviour. (Aleksander, 1982: 5);

Learning the foreign languages is at the same time learning the foreign cultures, while learning the other cultures is inseparably connected with acquiring languages (Torenc, 2007: 9),

Hence, the emphasis of the role of the culture in teaching foreign languages and the attention of the glottodidactics directed towards the intercultural communication based on the conveyance of the widely understood cultural and realities issues.

The essential meaning of socio-linguistic and socio-cultural issues in the process of teaching and acquiring foreign language is emphasized by numerous regulations of legal or statutory character. Not only the constitution of the Republic of Poland or the European charter of regional and minorities' languages which is being prepared by the Council of Europe are mentioned here, but also an addendum to one of the acts passed by the European Parliament. The addendum regards the description of the so-called key competences "understood as a set of knowledge, skills and abilities adjusted to a given context and necessary for the citizens to ensure personal development, civil activity, social and professional integration" (Wilczyńska, 2010: 116-117). These competences include the mediation between the cultures, sensing and expressing the interculture which directly influences the communication and interaction between the representatives of various cultures. This, in consequence, facilitates the improvement of the intercultural dialogue which is a very important task for integration, even if at European level (Wilczyńska, 2010: 116-117).

Another element of official character which should support the cultural education has the form or international education, however, limited number and themes involved (regarding, for example religious or state holidays) efficiently constricts the possibilities of increasing the knowledge on the customs and cultural inheritance of a given community (Niemiec-Knaś, 2007: 136).

Briefly, the nature of language as a tool used by culture is presented by a statement made by Małgorzata Niemiec-Knaś: "The person uttering a certain message will often be misunderstood if they lack socio-cultural knowledge. With language, the learner builds interactions, constructs the knowledge and understands it, but if they have no socio-cultural knowledge, they will not be able to reach the good, or high level of interaction and understanding the knowledge they gain when using the language", further the author emphasizes the importance of knowing the culture of a given society. (Niemiec-Knaś, 2007: 133-134).

Possessing the knowledge on the hierarchy of values or customs applied to a given community is a significant parameter of knowing the reality in which the community is functioning. The ignorance of the key issues regarding the culture of a different environment may not only lead to misunderstandings or quarrels but also to unknowing infringement of the dignity of people who observe other rules and know other customs and

traditions (Wilczyńska, 2010: 21). This is the origin of the nature of providing the students with cultural content regarding various walks of life, even if - until now - they have been seemingly perceived as insignificant. The errors of other nature than linguistic may result in us being perceived as rude, tactless, or even vulgar. Hence, the development of the observation skills and criticism of behaviour has an essential meaning for the communication process (Myczko, 2005: 33).

At this point it is worth to mention another phenomenon which confirms the strong link between the culture and language, namely, one of the stages of foreign language acquisition which is the so called "culture shock" followed by "culture stress" (Polok, 2006: 50). It is defined as "psychological reaction to a new environment, to the diversity of the world which is culturally distanced from the daily life we are familiar with" (Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 2004: 18), and results from the fact that given community perceives the surrounding world from another perspective and specifies, names and defines it in a different way. In the educational practice it translates into various problems of cultural and lexical nature which are faced by the learner when getting familiar with using various structures characteristic for a given community only slowly ceases to be a problem for the person acquiring the ability to use foreign speech. At this point one can notice an increased activity of the non-native speech, when the passivity which has been present due to stress begins to fade out. The significance of this phenomenon is so big because it shows that both of these terms cannot be treated individually as two separate phenomena. "Culture shock" is an inherent stage in the acquisition and acculturation of the language. It cannot be omitted in any way, hence, it is an additional argument confirming the special role culture plays in the process of learning a foreign language and the necessity to develop (inter)cultural competence in the course of the teaching process (Polok, 2006:51).

The fact that language and culture are two inseparable terms is emphasized by the statement made by Claude Lévi-Strauss: "For many reasons, I believe the language is the most fundamental cultural fact. Firstly, language is a part of the culture [...] Secondly, language is a basic instrument, a privileged means allowing us to acquire the culture of our group [...], language is the most perfect representation of the cultural order" (Charbonnier, 1968: 6). Such a notion seems to be backed up by the remark made by Gajda who claims that language is an important component of the culture because it serves all the elementary areas of culture. Language acts as a middle-man since such disciplines as art, religion or even daily life would not exist without such a medium as language (Gajda 2010: 72).

Many researches who look into the matter discussed in this paper make (successful) attempts to prove and justify why the (inter)cultural competence is a foundation of the dynamically developing glottodidactics. On one hand, as closely connected to the communication competence which not only allows the communication as such, but also the adjustment of the behaviour to the cultural background of a given language, it is a key skill which enables us to communicate efficiently with the representatives of another culture. What is more, the knowledge, understanding and acceptance of the customs, tradition and basis of functioning of a society in given language area in conjunction with the acquisition of a language give the learner a chance of re-constructing the realities and principles of the world-view which is embodied in speech it functions in (Pacholczyk, 2010: 111). On the other hand we are dealing with widely understood process of the globalization of the modern world which implicates the tendencies of becoming interested in multi-culture instead of mono-culture, which in turn makes us experience the development of new scientific sub-disciplines such as linguistic-realities studies or intercultural glottopedagogics.

For there are no doubts regarding the assumption that a person learning a foreign language should not only acquire the linguistic knowledge, but also be aware of the intercultural differences and similarities, so as to finally acquire the ability to perceive various matters through the prism of not only native culture and the point of view based on this culture, but also from the point of view of other civilizations functioning on the basis of different principles. The speaker should not only be able to notice the differences, but also develop respect, approval and acceptance of the behaviours which – in other culture – might be a new experience. In his paper Polok emphasizes that "the cultural representation of the reality [...] of language [...] must always be a full representation [...]. Hence, the importance of the way of delivering the information forming the view of the recipient of a given language to the culture it forms a part of" (Polok, 2006: 58).

Numerous research and observations confirm that for the learner of a language the possible lacks connected with limited or non-existent acquisition of the (inter)cultural competence in the course of the language learning process may result in misunderstandings in communication or lack of the acceptance of the community whose language they are using, since "the utterances without socio-cultural context may be linguistically correct but inadequate regarding the situation requirements (Lachowicz, 1987: 141); "the greater the socio-cultural distance between the sender and the recipient, the more often it happens that the communication message contains components which are quite distant from each other and cause misunderstandings. The latter may not result from the content itself but from the interpretation of the content caused for instance by the difference in the moral and customary standards. Therefore, it is necessary to make the students aware of the basic elements of knowledge on the society and culture" (Mazur, 1994: 26).

The assumption that the acculturation of a language ("gradual adjustment [of a learner] to the culture of the acquired language without the necessary resignation of the bond between language and native culture" – Polok, 2006:29) forms a basis for the acquisition process is confirmed, among others, by an observation performed by Genelle G. Morain which is quoted in Polok's paper. Morain's observation regards the way of looking at the interlocutor throughout the communication process. It turns out that in the case of conversing with a representative of the American culture, the occasional eye-contacts with the other persons surrounding us will be perceived in a different way than if we were talking to a German. While the former accepts the way of looking at people as described above, the latter will not be able to understand it, requiring a focused eye-contact with the interlocutor. Another research, carried out by Elizabeth Loftus, indicates that each element of reality we look upon has a specific value and influences the reception of what we see and hear. Loftus, on the basis of the observations made during screening a film about a road accident to various people indicates that each person individually creates in their mind an image of a given society and its members and individually adjusts various language structures to the image they see. In the result of such specific acts a final representation of the culture is created along with specific language code which shall be the resultant of these reflexions (Polok, 2006: 60).

Therefore, it is impossible to omit the issue of the socio-cultural competence in the process of foreign language teaching. After all, culture and, consequently, the society which functions in the culture and creates it, have a significant influence on this process. Quoting Polok: "during the teaching and learning a foreign language it is necessary to include various degrees of acculturation, or acquiring the elements of the culture which had and still have an undisputed influence (Polok, 2006: 22) and "any separation of the linguistic structures from the cultural background of the language will not only deviate the language learning process but also it will pose a serious obstacle on the learner's path to master the language" (Polok, 2006: 6). The conclusion from these ponderings is clear: the issue of mastering at least basic notions regarding the culture, or cultures within which a given language is functioning has a fundamental meaning for the process of becoming familiar with a given communication system and its assimilation.

II. SUMMARY

To sum up, it is worth to cite the theses on the role of culture studies in teaching German, which can be referred to the teaching of other foreign languages, discussed in detail by Gebal in the paper Realioznawstwo w nauczaniu języka niemieckiego /Cultural studies in teaching German. Characterising the general assumptions, goals and tasks of teaching culture and realities, the author lists the contribution to peaceful coexistence of people. Culture studies play central role in this aspect, because they present the reality of the country of a given language and cultural identity of its citizens. Then he points out the sensitization and development of the ability to deal with unfamiliar cultures through the assessment, relativisation and presentation in juxtapose with the reality of those who learn about culturally unfamiliar phenomena rather than by conveying information and plain facts, because in such a way only will they be shown and prejudices and stereotypes removed, while tolerance will be supported. Finally – the lecturers should be the ambassadors of the region of a given language through their own experience and proper choice of didactic material, good education and participation in professional development courses. Describing the didactic and methodical assumptions of conveying reality and cultural information, the author points out the necessity of the form of active confrontation/discussion with foreign cultures through the choice of appropriate material and way of conducting the classes including authentic material, various points of view and contradictions existing in a given society, historical subjects and texts informing about the connections between past, present and future; reference to the traces of foreign cultures in the students' country, and finally - encouraging the students to creative work, awakening the curiosity and desire to discover the new and the strange. The author emphasizes the role of the lecturers in the realisation of the assumptions of cultural studies, the necessity of education and professional development, cooperation in preparing the material, exchange of information, preparation of appropriate didactics and methodology of the lessons about realities and culture, which should be fully integrated with practical language teaching.

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