

## Cross-Cultural Communicative Competence in the Language Teaching of Future Translators

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**Abstract:** This article considers certain aspects of achieving cross-cultural communicative competence by university students through culture-oriented studies of English. It describes the principles of cross-cultural tuition and their implementation in the development of teaching materials using the example of a series of practical English textbooks for future translators developed at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

**Keywords:** *cross-cultural communicative competence, culture-focused teaching, communicative strategy, teaching principles, teaching resources, background knowledge, linguo-cultural and sociocultural knowledge*

**Introduction.** The trend towards the use of English as an international language has increased pace since the Second World War and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, perhaps driven by the internet, many sectors use English predominantly and whatever a person's political or national leanings may be, this fact is inescapable.

The consequent societal demand for teaching foreign languages, focused on English as a means of international communication, has brought to life the necessity of both theoretical understanding of the approach to teaching foreign languages and its practical implementation in secondary and higher educational establishments. In particular, we must focus on the necessity of producing teaching resources for foreign language tuition centred on culture and country-studies. This is evidenced by actual Ukrainian legislation requiring the teaching of English from the first grade at primary school and a second foreign language from the fifth grade [1].

**Short review of publications.** There is a crucial duty of all teachers of English in Ukraine to ensure that our pupils and students are able to communicate freely and accurately in English without interruption by factors that needlessly block the processes of understanding. This area is studied extensively by many schools of linguistics, including that of the perhaps predominant principle of linguistic relativity which proposes that the cognitive perception of a language affects the ways in which its respective speakers conceptualize their world in their world view, which in turn shapes their cognitive processes. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has two key aspects: that language determines thought, and that linguistic categories limit and determine cognitive categories, while an alternative view states that linguistic categories and usage influence thought and certain kinds of non-linguistic behaviour [2, p.84].

This process underlying teaching linguistics in general and translation in particular is underpinned in Ukraine by the dominant approach to translation as a science and machine/computer translation as "applied science" or "applied linguistics", disciplines which can be found in each Ukrainian university syllabus of linguistics. Hayek, Nobel Laureate, succinctly described this tendency:

"The persistent effort of modern Science has been to get down to "objective facts," to cease studying what men thought about nature or regarding the given concepts as true images of the real world, and, above all, to discard all theories which pretended to explain phenomena by imputing to them a directing mind like our own. Instead, its main task became to revise and reconstruct the concepts formed from ordinary experience on the basis of a systematic testing of the phenomena, so as to be better able to recognize the particular as an instance of a general rule." [3, p.143]

This is scientism [4,5,6] and it has influenced the teaching of translation significantly, whereas many linguists, including the author of this article, believe that translation is not so much a science as an art. This article goes no further in any such analysis but focuses on the cross-cultural aspects of teaching translation as an art, cross-cultural competence being an inseparable and, in fact, the principle component in teaching translation in higher education and, in particular, to future professional translators.

The problem of making textbooks better and more effective goes much deeper than avoiding obsolete slang, archaic language and seriously out-dated grammar and sentence construction. The very way that people learn English is greatly dependent on the sociocultural factors that influence their perception of language and communication and consequently their ability to learn accurately.

Nations and regions of our planet still have fundamentally different approaches to the sociocultural interpretation and use of the stimuli that bombard us. The largest group is of course the Chinese bloc which has a population of over one and a half billion, some 20% of the planet. The languages used by that bloc comprise a Sino-Tibetan macrolanguage with 13 main sublanguages. But they generally have common sociocultural perceptions by their users.

The Indian sub-continent of some 1.5 billion people has two language groups, Indo-European and Dravidian, and 1,652 mother tongues. Here, the Indian Constitution recognizes English as a common language for official use. But again, common sociocultural factors unite the many ethnic groups and languages.

The job of comparing and contrasting nations, their cultures and their sociocultural identities is complex but important. The issue of learning language and culture simultaneously has been studied by many Ukrainian and overseas academics majoring in linguistics and translation studies, as well as in philosophy. The postulate of the necessity to translate not only from 'language to language' but also from 'culture to culture' has for a long time been a cornerstone in theoretical education and practical training of future translators.

Yet the issue of the building of communicative competence by means of culture-oriented teaching at English language classes for future linguists and translators as a comprehensive systematic phenomenon has not so far been studied in detail. This is true of both its theoretical aspect and its practical aspect of writing textbooks and course books to teach mandatory subjects at an advanced level and, in particular, practical courses of English textbooks for Bachelor's and Master's students.

The notion of cross-cultural communicative competence as the ability by an individual to achieve effective

communication in a cross-cultural environment for future translators, transforms into a capability through a set of skills to ensure that such communication is achieved between representatives of different cultures. For such representatives, communication is mediated and the translator becomes the mediator, and in fact is needed as such, since the participants involved in communication may lack knowledge of the foreign language and culture, with which they are dealing.

A cross-cultural approach in teaching a foreign language as a mandatory discipline when educating future professionals presupposes the acquisition of linguistic and sociocultural knowledge and the development of communicative skills by future linguists and translators. Such skills should be based on the rules and the norms of verbal and non-verbal communication as accepted in the language community of the language being studied. In this context, culture must be understood as a broad term: it is not only language and national specifics, but also includes professional-, age-, gender-, and religion-specific culture.

Students should not only possess appropriate cultural background knowledge, but also be capable of applying it to specific communication situations. Communication should be understood not only as oral communication, but communication in writing as well. Thus, students must actively use certain communicative strategies and skills that must ensure their success as future professional translators.

‘The purpose in teaching translation, – says Natalia Bashuk, – is the acquisition of specific translator’s competences, by which we understand the knowledge and skill sets necessary for translation as an activity: these are first and foremost bilingual, communicative, psychophysical, and technical competences, as well as the personal characteristics of the translator. When translating, they must be capable to focus, mobilise all their potential and memory resources, be capable to switch their attention, to switch from one language to another, from one culture to another’ [7, p.47].

Thus the build-up of cross-cultural communicative competence by students of Translation Departments must be understood as conscious and pro-active mastering by such students of certain communicative strategies and tactics of verbal behaviour in a foreign language environment.

This purpose may be achieved by many means, including using up-to-date, authentic, high-quality teaching resources of both a verbal and an audio-visual nature in the process of tuition. Such tuition should again be understood broadly not only as tuition in class, but also as self-supervised tuition, which recently has been given more attention in Ukraine. It must be based on the curriculum and be monitored by the tutor. The selection and composition of such authentic materials to be used in teaching must be based on certain culture-focused teaching principles which we discuss below.

**The results of the research.** A number of such principles for teaching a foreign language, with which we completely agree, were described in general terms by such Ukrainian academics as O. Kasatkina, M. Zubilevich, T. Lyashko, T. Skubashevskaya, and V. Byalyk. These principles, as well as some others, were used for the methodological concept and approach when writing a series of textbooks of practical courses of English under the title ‘English for Translators and Linguists’. The series is aimed at Bachelor’s and Master’s students at Linguistics and Translation Departments of universities. It was written by a group of authors at the Department of Theory and

Practice of Translation from English at the Institute of Linguistics of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. The series was published and has been successfully used for a number of years in teaching English at that university and many others.

The unquestionable quality of language material and background knowledge offered by this textbook was considered by its authors as one of the most important principles of culture-focused teaching. The textbook is aimed at students who have mastered English at least at the upper-intermediate level and who have chosen linguistics and translation as their area of expertise, hence the requirement for high standards of language material as used in the textbook.

Language resources should be not only authentic: they must reflect the current state of the English language, focusing on typical usage and paying certain attention to the differences between variations of the English language. It was not an easy task to assess the quality of language material, which is always a challenge for a non-native speaker. The problems involved the appraisal of the style of texts in terms of grammatical correctness, modern or obsolete vocabulary, typical or untypical usage, emotional and other colouring, the number and quality of stylistic devices and other criteria.

Such assessment was absolutely necessary as it is unacceptable to introduce words, phrases, idioms and constructions that are of date, infrequently used, their use limited to a particular area, or simply erroneous. In general terms, these may be summarised as those linguistic units that are non-typical and uncharacteristic for modern English usage. An eminent Ukrainian translation theoretician Vyacheslav Karaban says in this respect: “Translation is the re-creation of a text that was written according to usage in the source language into a text that is written according to the usage of the target language. Hence teaching usage in both the source and the target languages becomes an important aspect in training translators, as the translation process involves both usages. In translators’ education, not enough attention is paid to this fact. Students are mostly taught language systems and standards, whereas the usage in both source and target languages is taught insufficiently and non-systematically” [8, p. 25].

Teaching modern usage can be achieved only when relying on the best examples of modern fiction and journalism. Thus, the selection of texts from Galsworthy, Dreiser, Somerset Maugham, London, Jerome, Priestley, Christie, Montgomery, and Fielding, however good these authors might be for learning the history of English and American literature, is not justified for the purposes of teaching modern English usage and contemporary language.

The objective as described above was achieved in this particular textbook series [9, 10, 11, 12, 13] with the assistance of Alexander Haponiev, a British native speaker, graduate of Manchester University and others, who helped to select texts from the whole bulk of modern English and American literature, wrote a whole number of texts for the purposes of this textbook series and edited the English part of it.

Excerpts were selected according to the topics of the teaching programmes from such famous contemporary authors as Bill Bryson, Minette Walters, Dan Brown, Scott Adams, Julian Barnes, Terry Pratchett, Ian Rankin, P.J. O’Rourke, Jeremy Paxman, John Simpson, John Le Carre, Michael Crichton and others, as we believe that the language used by these authors reflects the current state of the English language and the spirit of our times.

The original texts are accompanied by vocabulary and culture-focused comments which significantly enhance the linguo-cultural and sociocultural knowledge of students, and in many instances root out the false stereotypes existing in Ukrainian society about the life and culture in English-speaking countries. It is important also for students majoring in translation that the textbook series offers translations of lexical lacunas, i.e. national- or culture-specific vocabulary. Such translations may have been made using either descriptive or analogous methods, transliteration or transcription, or combined forms of the above. The use of a huge quantity of language and cultural information undoubtedly adds to the cognitive processes which students undergo. The enhancement of such processes is considered as one of the principles of culture-focused teaching [14, p. 432].

The same principle is also realised through the tasks where students have to research certain issues in accordance with the curriculum topics using all available sources of information (such as television and the Internet). The same purpose may be achieved by using audio- and video-materials directly linked to the textbook telling students about life in English-speaking countries. These may be carefully selected feature and documentary films, television programmes and others, the viewing of which in certain amounts must become an inseparable part of the tuition process, as it is difficult to overestimate the cognitive value of such an approach. We must note in this respect that unfortunately Ukrainian students do not on the whole have the habit of watching news, films or television programmes in the source language in the necessary quantities without strong motivation from their lecturers.

Active involvement of students in the tuition process, when students are encouraged in class to express their feelings and use their personal experience and background knowledge, constitutes another important principle of culture-focused teaching [14, p.432].

The textbook series implements this principle through a set of tasks to introduce each topic where students are encouraged to speak out about their thoughts and feelings on certain issues, using language skills already in existence, background knowledge and personal experience. The tasks also include exercises to develop productive skills through the discussion of the topics studied at the end of each section, when students sum up their knowledge and correct their judgements based on the newly acquired vocabulary and background knowledge. At the same time, the cyclic

principle of tuition is effected, which ensures that students deepen their background knowledge and improve their language skills in certain topics which focus on country studies, culture, and politics, as well as various language aspects at each new stage of learning.

The principle of student involvement in the learning activities that imitate real communicative situations is consistently implemented in each section of the textbook series through role-play tasks, which describe the situation of communication, specify the roles of the participants and their objectives. Examples of such role-play include a court hearing based on audio material taken from a CNN panel discussion, or political debates on certain specified topics where roles and other communication parameters are defined.

The principle of involvement of students in team work and the development of the sense of responsibility for their own tuition, the development of skills for self-supervised work is realised in both group and individual projects, which are so far a relatively new and sparsely used kind of learning activity in Ukraine. The respective tasks may be found in each section of the textbook series and become of especial importance in the education of MA students. Examples of such work include preparation of presentations on specific topics with the use of multimedia and other means, individual and team research on certain topics related to the teaching programme that widen the linguo-cultural and sociocultural knowledge of students, and writing an review of a book of fiction. Such projects may be aimed at the development of a set of skills for academic work, such as group presentations on the variations and dialects of the English language, or writing a review of an academic work. The students then present the results of their team or individual work either in writing (a report, an essay, bullet-points) or audiovisually (presentation).

**Conclusions.** Thus, culture-focused teaching, as we can see, may be put into practice through different forms and varied teaching methods. Such teaching uses language and culture-focused resources of different degrees of complexity depending on the target audience and the objectives it pursues. The effective use of such teaching means and methods may result in the achievement of the final goal of cross-cultural communicative competence of future translators, whose direct professional goal is to mediate in communication between the representatives of different languages and cultures.

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