Pilar Rodríguez Arancón

HOW TO DEVELOP AND EVALUATE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN A BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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HOW TO DEVELOP AND EVALUATE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN A BLENDED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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"The person who learns language without learning culture risks becoming a fluent fool" (J. Bennet, M. Bennet and W. Allen, 2003: 237)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

3Cs Cross-Cultural Competence

A Agentive Role

AC Achievement

ACTFL American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

ALTE Association of Language Testers in Europe

AI Artificial Intelligence

AILA International Association of Applied Linguistics

ATLAS Applying Technology to Languages

AUS Australia

BEC Benevolence-Caring

BED Benevolence-Dependability

BL Blended Learning

C Channel

CALL Computer Assisted Language Learning

CCAI Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory

CDCS European Committee for Social Cohesion

CEFR Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning,

Teaching, Assessment

CLIL Context and Language Integrated Learning

CLSL Centre for Language in Social Life

CMM Computer-Mediated Communication

COI Conformity-Interpersonal

COR Conformity-Rules

CSCL Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning

D Social Distance

DTCA Direct-To-Consumer Advertising

E Medium

e.g. Exempli gratia (for example)

ECML European Centre for Modern Languages

EHEA European Higher Education Area

ELF English as a Lingua Franca

ELP English Language Portfolio

ESP English for Specific Purposes

EU European Union

ET AL. Et alii (and others)

FAC Conservation of Face

FRA France

FSI Foreign Language Institute

G Goal Orientation

GBR Great Britain

GDP Gross Domestic Power

H Social Hierarchy

HU Humility

I-AGENT Intelligent Adaptive Generic English Tutor

IBM International Business Machines

ICALL Intelligent Computer Assisted Language Learning

ICT Information and Communication Technology

i.e. it est

ID or IDV Individualism vs. Collectivism

IDI Interultural Development Inventory

ILT Intercultural Language Teaching

INCA Intercultural Competence Assessment

IRIC Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation

IT Information Technology

IVR Indulgence vs. Self-restraint

JPN Japan

L Action with Symbols

L1 Mother Tongue or First Language

L2 Second Language

LAMS Learning Activity Management Systems

LSP Language for Specific Purposes

LTO Long-Term Orientation

M Material Action

MAS Masculinity vs. Femininity

MCEETYA Ministerial Council for Education Employment and Training

MEXT Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

MOODLE Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment

N Network Morphology

NALF The National Assessment Framework for Languages

OWL Web Ontology Language

PAK Pakistan

p. Page

Per. com. Personal Communication

p.p. Pages

PD or PDI Power Distance

POD Power-Dominance

POR Power-Resources

R Role of Language

S Sphere of Action

SDA Self-Direction of Action

SDT Self-Direction of Thought

SEP Security-Personal

SES Security-Societal

SFL Systemic Functional Linguistics

SPA Spain

ST Stimulation

SVS Schwartz's Value Survey

SWI Switzerland

TR Tradition

UA or UAI Uncertainty Avoidance

UK United Kingdom

UNC Universalism-Concern

UNED Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

Organization

UNN Universalism-Nature

UNT Universalim-Tolerance

US or USA United States of America

VEN Venezuela

vs. Versus

ZPD Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 General introduction

Language is, as it were, the external manifestation of the minds of peoples. Their language is their soul, and their soul is their language. How they combine with each other in one and precisely the same source is incomprehensible to us and remains inexplicably concealed from our perception (p. 24).

Each tongue draws a circle about the people to whom it belongs, and it is possible to leave this circle only by entering that of other people. Learning a foreign language ought hence to be the conquest of a new standpoint in the previously prevailing cosmic attitude of the individual (p. 39).

Those two quotes from Humbolt (1971) illustrate this piece of reseach: the idea that language and culture are intrinsically linked, and that it is, therefore, essential to understand the culture of its people in order to speak a language adequately.

This reality is all the more remarkable as learning a second language is becoming a necessity for European citizens in the 21st century as Europe strives to find a common identity. In accordance with the principle of "unity in diversity", the European Union (EU henceforth) promotes the diversity of its cultures, while "bringing the common cultural heritage¹ to the fore" (Article 151, Treaty Establishing the EU). In its Faro Convention (Article 7), the Council of Europe argued that cultural heritage² reinforces human development, as it is a fundamental element of dialogue between human groups and specifically between European societies:

Гhе

¹ The Council of Europe defines *cultural heritage* as a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time (Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society opened for signature in Faro on 27 October 2005).

² The work is in keeping with the definition of *culture* previously accepted by UNESCO and the Council of Europe: "In its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (UNESCO, World Conference on Cultural Policies, 1982).

The Parties undertake [...] to [...] encourage reflection on the ethics and methods of presentation of the cultural heritage, as well as respect for diversity of interpretations; [...] establish processes for conciliation to deal equitably with situations where contradictory values are placed on the same cultural heritage by different communities; [...] develop knowledge of cultural heritage as a resource to facilitate peaceful coexistence by promoting trust and mutual understanding with a view to resolution and prevention of conflicts; [and] integrate these approaches into all aspects of lifelong education and training.

Thus, a double phenomenon, which obviously influences national linguistic policies, becomes apparent: on the one hand, the idea of European integration and the development of European identity are regarded as vital objectives; on the other hand, linguistic diversity is considered to be "one of the European Union's defining features" and "respect for the diversity of the Union's languages is a founding principle of the European Union" (Council of Europe, 2003: 12).

European identity is promoted in three fundamental aspects. Firstly, through social and economic cohesion, by counteracting social and economic differences (European Committee for Social Cohesion [CDCS], 2004). Secondly, via politics, by strengthening democratic participation at all levels, and ensuring more democracy at EU level in order to secure "stability, peace and social justice" (Jacobs and Maier, 1998: 10). And finally, through education and culture by strengthening the European dimension and emphasising the importance of language learning, as language is what enables interaction, human relations at the private and public levels, and cultural exchange. These three aspects can be seen as intertwined, as stated in *Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004 – 2006* (Council of Europe, 2003: 24):

Building a common home in which to live, work and trade together means acquiring the skills to communicate with one another effectively and to understand one another better. Learning and speaking other languages encourages us to become more open to others, their cultures and outlooks. The ability to understand and communicate in other languages is a basic skill for European citizens.

The purpose behind this statement is not merely to gain a sense of political unity; it also indicates a deep understanding of languages as reflections of cultural

identity, vehicles of communication, and also of their learning process as an enrichment which goes further than a commendable academic achievement, as pointed out in the Bologna Declaration (European Commission, 1999: 7):

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.

This "shared space" is now formed by 27 European countries and 23 official languages. In fact, the EU "is home to more than 60 indigenous regional or minority languages, spoken by around 40 million people. They include Catalan, Basque, Frisian, Saami, Welsh and Yiddish". The EU's policy also aims to protect and promote these minority languages, which in some instances are even at risk of extinction (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001: 3). In Russia, for example, over 20 languages and hundreds of different dialects coexist, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Languages currently spoken in Russia. Available at: http://euroheritage.net/languagesofeurope.shtml

Thus, the EU provides support for language learning, among other reasons, because:

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³ http://europa.eu/pol/mult/index_en.htm

- It can help build a sense of community between individuals and nations.
- It is essential for living together in a multilingual and multicultural Europe.
- It encourages the movement of workers in an area without internal borders.
- Businesses need multilingual staff in order to trade effectively across Europe.
- The language industry (translation and interpretation, language teaching, language technologies, etc.) is one of the fastest growing areas of the economy.

Moreover, this idea that learning languages is highly useful in modern society seems to have permeated the thinking of the population in Europe, as the results of the Eurobarometer 3864 (2012) survey demonstrated. This survey was carried out by TNS Opinion & Social network in the 27 member states of the EU between 25th February and 11th March 2012, during which time 26,751 interviews took place. It was found then that 88% of Europeans considered knowing languages other than their mother tongue (L1 henceforth) very useful, and 98% believed that mastering another foreign language (L2 henceforth) was important for the future of their children. 44% of respondents claimed to be able to understand at least one L2 well enough to follow the news on radio or television, although they were less likely to use it to communicate online, just 39%. 54% said they were able to hold a conversation in at least one L2, 25% in two L2s and 10% in at least three. The most widely spoken L1 in Europe is German (16%), followed by Italian and English (13% each), French (12%) and Spanish (11%). In addition to their L1, the L2 most frequently known by Europeans is English (38%), followed by French (12%), German (11%), Spanish (7%) and Russian (5%). A surprising 54% of Spaniards said they were monolingual, a fact that is more outstanding as Spain is a country with extensive areas of bilingual communities, such as the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia. The most remarkable changes that can be observed when comparing these results with those of the previous Eurobarometer (2005) are an increase in the proportion of Europeans who regularly use an L2 on the Internet (up by 10%), and when watching films or television or listening to the radio (up by 8%).

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⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_386_en.pdf

Thus, although the importance of speaking an L2 seems to be obvious and accepted across all nationalities, not all European countries achieve the same goals in mastering one or more of them. Spain, in particular, presents a lower level of knowledge than many other European countries. This situation is changing for the better, as the EF English Proficiency Index Reports (2013: 1)⁵ pointed out, "Spanish adults are progressively improving their English, as attitudes towards English shift and economic pressure makes practical job skills more important". This report compared the data gathered in its previous survey carried out from 2007 to 2009, where "Spain ranked last among all European countries in English proficiency" to that obtained in 2013 in which it was clear that "Spain has made progress, outpacing both France and Italy. In Europe, only Poland and Hungary have improved their English more than Spain during the past six years". The latest report considered that the reasons for this change had been due to the widespread bilingual education programs in primary and preprimary education levels as well as the number of students and professionals living overseas. This is obviously positive but, at the same time, accentuates the need for adults to improve their level of English, as there is an increasing tendency for citizens to move across national borders in order to study or work, which is also supported by the EU, as mentioned earlier.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (henceforth CEFR) published by the Council of Europe in 2001 was the culmination of its efforts on linguistic policy since its foundation (Bárcena and Rodríguez-Arancón, 2008). It aims "to promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective international communication" (p. 3). This belief in the promotion of intercultural competence through the teaching of languages at any age, which is therefore to be seen as a major contributor to intercultural harmony, carries consequences across the whole spectrum of the teaching and learning of foreign languages. As Crozet et al. (1999: 1) explained: "intercultural language teaching, the emerging new paradigm in foreign language education, represents the first significant shift in language teaching history towards the teaching of culture as an integral part of language." Remarkably, this "new paradigm" had seemed obvious to Malinowski as early as 1923 (p. 307):

⁵ EF English Proficiency Report (2013). Available at:

http://media.ef.com/sitecore/__/~/media/efcom/epi/2014/pdf/spotlights/ef-epi-spain.pdf