

INTERCULTURAL METHODS OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

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INTERCULTURALISM
teachers
TEACHING
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COMMUNICATIVE
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INTERCULTURAL
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INTRODUCTION

Since I live in the border area and work at the Research Institute in Koper in Slovenia and at the University of Trieste in Italy, I can say that I have to deal with the issues of bilingual education every day. So, I encounter at least two languages every day, Slovenian and Italian, and I give my students lectures in Slovenian and Italian at the same time. We always treat languages in a contrastive way. This simultaneous treatment of two or more languages and cultures is also the essence of the intercultural language education I would like to talk about today. Recently, we have been a partner in a national project funded by the European Union "Languages Matters". The main goal of the project is to determine which factors support and which hinder the creation of a supportive learning environment for the development of plurilingualism and interculturalism in the Slovenian school context.

So, first I would like to present some experiences of language policy and bilingual and intercultural education in our border area of Slovenian Istria, and then I will explain some educational approaches that we have developed through years of theoretical and practical work. I will show how important is knowing the NATURE OF INTERETHNIC AWARENESS IN THE YOUNG GENERATION and different approaches in gaining the INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE. Finally I will present some important methods in Intercultural Education in L2 and L1 Teaching:

- EXPERIENCE OF THE SLOVENIAN ISTRIA
- NATURE OF INTERETHNIC AWARENESS IN THE

YOUNG GENERATION

- INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE
- INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION
 - *The Why and How in Intercultural Education in L2 Teaching*
 - *The Why and How in Intercultural Education in L1 Teaching*

EXPERIENCE OF THE SLOVENIAN ISTRIA

The Istria peninsula which lies on the Croatian-Slovenian and Slovenian-Italian border has always been a place of migrations and today continues to be a multicultural region. In the Slovenian part, in the region known as Slovenian Istria, the Slovenian majority lives alongside the Italian native minority as well as many minorities from the former Yugoslavia such as Croats, Serbs, Bosnians, Albanians, Macedonians etc. who came to Slovenia for economic reasons in the 1960's and 70's (the port and car industry), and then again after the wars in the Balkans region in 90's. Most of the region is bilingual as both Slovenian and Italian are official languages. There are primary and secondary schools with Slovenian as the language of instruction with Italian as an obligatory subject, and vice versa with schools with Italian as the language of instruction and with Slovenian as an obligatory school subject. The aim of the local and national language policy for this region is to obtain a collective Slovenian-Italian bilingualism and an interculturalism of the whole population. Such minority and language policy started in the fifties after the London Agreement in 1954. In the 1970s, 1980s and

1990s this was realized with school curricula for the Slovenian and Italian languages as L1 and L2, which introduced modern aims and methods of language teaching as well as with a substantial amount of knowledge of Italian acquired from the environment thanks to the Italian media, particularly television. Today, however, in addition to following Slovenian commercial television and radio programs, young people in particular live in a virtual world that is linked to English more than ever before. Like young people all around the world they come in contact with a global culture based on the use of the English language.

Therefore, because they follow new media that are largely in English, and because they no longer get as much prior knowledge of other languages from the environment, the curricula must also adapt to this. On the one hand, they must not be as demanding as in the past; on the other hand, they must focus on the issue of motivation to learn both languages, Slovene and Italian.

THE NATURE OF INTERETHNIC AWARENESS IN THE YOUNG GENERATION

Regarding the motivation it's important to know the nature of interethnic awareness. Here we can rely on insights of one of our surveys, which has clearly shown that the interethnic awareness of the young generation is based mostly on dynamic/active components, less on the cognitive components and, to a very small extent, emotional components. Young people are very pragmatic and accept their culture and intercultural features in everyday situations. If they come in contact

with the English language every day, they will accept it without any prejudice. So, young people "live" also their culture and their neighboring cultures and languages without any special emotional charge. The emotional components, like pride in one's culture and language, is not extremely prominent in young people, however, it increases with age, which means that the older generations have a more positive emotional attitude towards their first and other cultures in comparison to younger generations. Of course, this applies to life under normal conditions; in times of various escalations and social crises, it is possible to quickly incite more extreme emotions in young people.

Actually, we should know that on the one hand as young people are characterized by an unburdened view of reality and a natural curiosity and they greatly accept and share intercultural values like multiculturalism, tolerance, and the co-existence of different national communities, while on the other hand, due to a lack of experience, their perception of cultural diversity can be very stereotypical. For this reason, young people can easily become victims of various kinds of manipulation, which leads to a circle of prejudiced thinking as well as violent behavior when it comes to ethnic issues and questions of religion or race.

So, we cannot leave the interethnic awareness and language competence of young people to be influenced only by changing social circumstances, they have to be approached by intercultural education on all levels of the educational system.

Because of the explained nature of the interethnic awareness in young people, the motivation for learning language and culture should be based

more on activity and knowledge rather than on emotional attitude. Students should be involved in the cultural reality of their surroundings instead of learning about abstract intercultural values. During classwork, students should independently explore new sources of information for different cultural backgrounds, and validate their opinions on various cultures through projects. As noted by Byram, the competence of interaction is the main part of the intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). They should find their intercultural awareness and multilingualism useful and interesting in their everyday life. On this basis they will also develop their openness and other positive emotions toward different cultures and languages.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

So, which competences are developed through the intercultural education?

Intercultural education should raise children's/adolescents' awareness of cultural identity or hybrid identities that are present in their immediate and wider family. Children should also learn about the elements of other cultures in the immediate environment, which also represent a part of the social and spatial identity of their region and country. Last but not least, children are supposed to learn about the elements of other foreign cultures that individually occur in their environment (e.g., a child from another country migrates to a certain place) or other foreign cultures (with the help of literature, the internet, travel, etc.).

Self-awareness of their own culture and ability for empathy towards

other cultures are important conditions for successful contemporary intercultural communication. Finally, many studies show that it is easier for those young people who have learned other languages and have learned about other cultures early on to cross the mental barriers of different cultures. They are able to accept diversity and various differences as well as learn a foreign language easily.

But knowing young people and their feelings of ethnicity is merely a starting point for achieving the objectives of intercultural education for any teacher of L1 and L2.

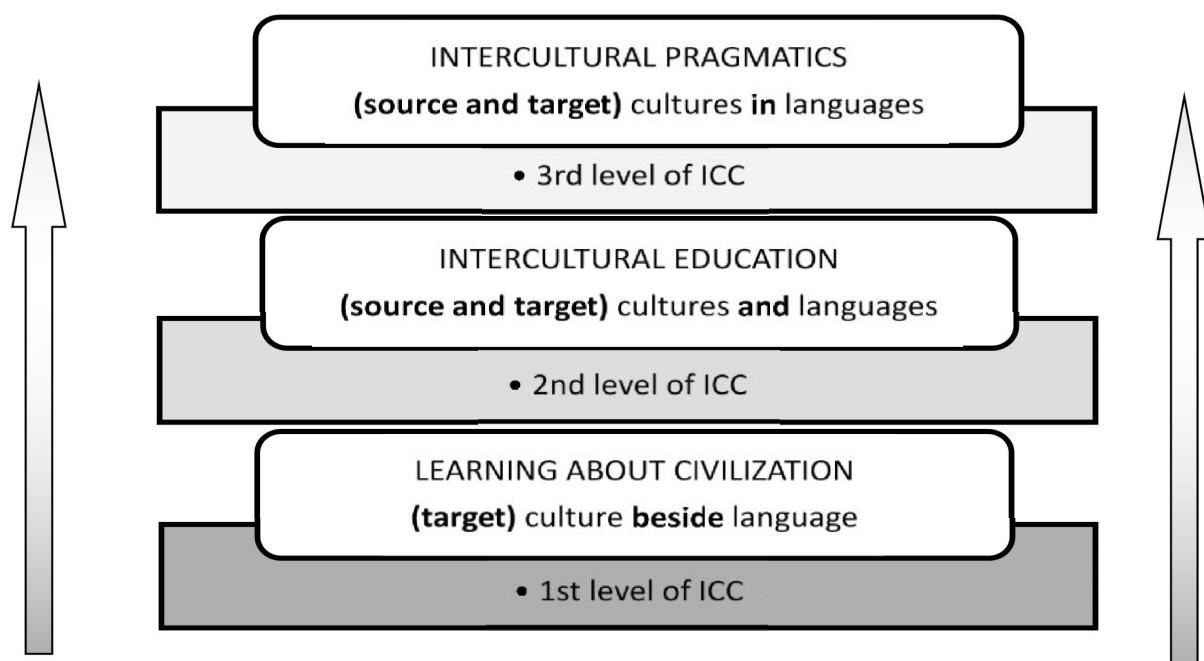
Educating for intercultural and interethnic awareness presents a highly interdisciplinary approach the results of which are reflected in a wide range of teacher competences, too, both general and subject-specific. A teacher should, therefore, be able to: integrate various sciences and forms of knowledge, use different methods and organize cross-curricular integration and apply other forms of the holistic approach to teaching and both research and experiential learning that enable the development of interethnic awareness. The teacher should be primarily a guide who moderates the independent work and research of students, a tutor upon the students' maturation, and an interlocutor in the formulation of the students' respective views on social relations, including interethnic.

For a teacher, the skills that relate to his/her own awareness of the ethnic issue are appropriate. A teacher's interethnic awareness, which involves the relationship to a first and also to other cultures as well as common cultural values, is a prerequisite for raising awareness in students. Only a teacher with a clear attitude towards his/her own culture and other cultures can inform his/her students on the elements of the first

and other cultures and help them identify their own perceptions and dispute ethnic stereotypes, therefore a teacher also helps to shape their national and ethnic awareness as well as a tolerant and empathic attitude towards other cultures.

Thus, intercultural education, where the emphasis is on the confrontation of first and second culture, first and second language, is an approach that emanates from the immediate environment and teaches for living in an environment that is not monoethnic, monolingual. This is important irrespective of whether the teacher is of the first or second/foreign language.

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION



Approaches towards Intercultural Communicative Competence

There are different approaches toward the intercultural communicative competence or, in other words, three levels of intercultural education in a broad sense of the word can be described (see Figure 17).

On the first level, the intercultural education consists of the so-called learning about civilization, which means that language and culture are taught separately and the intercultural competence is limited on the knowledge of cultural traditions and customs of the target language community.

It can go further towards critical reflection concerning the source and target culture that arises from the direct and constant comparison of two cultures, so **on the second level** we are talking about the intercultural education in the real meaning of the word.

The intercultural education which intends to **the highest, third level** of intercultural competence is represented by observing how cultures are expressed in languages. It is oriented toward the understanding of differences in the linguistic elements of the source and target languages, which derive from cultural differences. The final approach is that of the focus on intercultural pragmatics. Intercultural pragmatics, particularly the approach established by the Polish-Australian linguist Anna Wierzbicka (2003), deals with the contrastive analysis of different languages at both the semantic and pragmatic levels, so it deals with intercultural treatment of words, word combinations, and texts.

Modern language technologies allow for such methods, especially text corpora, which enable the execution of small-scale statistically supported analyses and a cross-linguistic comparison of language data in the

classroom. On this basis, one can make conclusions about the cultural background of linguistic expressions more easily and with more evidence.

Such research work, using text corpora and other language resources, is a motivation for more in-depth learning of language and culture, which undoubtedly provides a higher level of intercultural communicative competence. In addition, such approaches in teaching develop not only the cognitive and emotional components of intercultural communicative competence, but also the active/dynamic component. Under the teacher's supervision, students independently explore new sources of information for different cultural backgrounds, gather information, compare materials, discuss similarities and differences, and validate their opinions on various cultural backgrounds through projects.

In general, modern first or second/foreign language teaching increasingly emphasizes the importance of students' active participation. It puts the students' needs and desires at the forefront of teaching, while the teacher retreats into the background and acts only to guide and supervise the students' activities. The activities require appropriate materials, tailored to individual work, and various types of materials and learning resources (web materials, films, television shows, newspapers, LSP and other non-literary texts, literary texts, musical texts, etc.). This approach allows students to develop cognitive competence and know how to use it in everyday situations of intercultural communication.

This is important irrespective of whether the teacher is of the first or second/foreign language.

THE WHY AND HOW IN INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN L2 TEACHING

Let's see firstly why include intercultural aspects in teaching the language as a second/foreign language? The didactics of a second/foreign language can be otherwise based on different theoretical frameworks, such as the concept of intercultural education in foreign language teaching, the theory of speech acts, Halliday's functional linguistics, translation theory, interdisciplinary theory, theory of languages in contact and language transfer (cf. Štrukelj, 2000), but they mostly share a common purpose, i.e., from an intercultural point of view, through shedding light on linguistic phenomena in foreign language teaching in order to reach an informed acceptance of different linguistic and cultural realities, thus helping students to avoid lapses in intercultural communication.

Obviously, it is necessary to take into account the student's prior language proficiency, therefore, we engage differently in teaching beginners than teaching intermediate levels and, again, differently at advanced levels. The point is that all levels of teaching can develop all three approaches to intercultural communicative competence: first, the separate teaching of the target language and culture, second, the source and the target languages and cultures in parallel, and third, the target and the source culture both expressed in the target and the source language. When discussing a certain topic and at a certain level of language proficiency, one of these approaches may be more noticeable and, at other times, another approach may stand out. With beginners,

we will probably more often discuss culture in the form of information about the culture separately from the language (**1st level of intercultural education**), while at the advanced level we can often observe how the culture is reflected in the very language of signs and structures (**3rd level of intercultural education**). At all levels of the students' prior language proficiency, it is always sensible to face the target language and culture with the source languages and cultures (**2nd level of intercultural education**). In this way, the students will be more motivated because the subject of observation will always be their primary culture. Also, due to the creative and exploratory approach, which is required by such intercultural confrontation, the acquired language skills will be more durable and equipped with intercultural ability.

All three approaches are, of course, also useful for teaching L1, which can have a number of common goals and methods in common with teaching L2, but let's see why it makes sense to include multicultural content also in L1 teaching.

THE WHY AND HOW IN INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN L1 TEACHING

The purpose of linking the content of other cultures with elements of the first language and culture (especially literature) in teaching the mother tongue is not only learning about other cultures, but also raising awareness of the specificities of the primary or majority culture. Social psychology and the related social science knowledge talks about the fact that only when facing other identities do we become more intensely aware of our own identity. This is particularly relevant for the young

population, which was previously described as experiencing their ethnicity unlike older generations – without a special emotional charge and perceive it as an implicit component of the everyday, particularly local activities. The young declare their ethnicity clearly only in situations where they deem it necessary, for example, situations of intercultural confrontation, which means that young people are aware of their national identity, especially when in direct contact with members of other nationalities.

The integration of ethnic identity and culture in language teaching also means creating opportunities for the exchange of personal experiences regarding the individual's ethnic identity in mutual contact. This could also mean the promotion of such contacts or the further exploration of these issues outside the school environment. This is all a challenge for a creative and engaged approach for teachers, which can similarly encourage students' attitudes towards the covered topics and thus additionally motivate them to learn the L1 subject content.

In the case of the cross-cultural analysis of L1 and languages that we come into contact with, we can therefore clearly examine the particularities of L1, which can be better illuminated not only by those who learn it as a second/foreign language, but also by native speakers of L1. In this way we will develop, broaden and deepen our intercultural communicative competence in L1, whereby the students will be equipped for the use of L1 in everyday intercultural situations.

The fact that young people are aware that they can draw languages and cultures from the immediate environment and that they can then apply this knowledge in everyday situations is the most important goal and at the same time the greatest motivation for learning languages. On this basis, they also develop their emotional competence in a very natural way, so they start to like languages and cultures, as well as the process of learning them.