



ALICJA GAŁĄZKA

## Intercultural communication through drama in the language classroom — teachers' perspective

**Komunikacja międzykulturowa przez medium dramy  
w procesie nauczania języka obcego z perspektywy nauczyciela**

**Abstrakt:** W artykule podjęto zagadnienie rozwijania świadomości oraz potrzeby stymulowania wiedzy i umiejętności z zakresu komunikacji interkulturowej u nauczycieli języków obcych. Język i kultura są z sobą nierozzerwalnie związane i stanowią podstawę rozwoju kompetencji komunikacyjnej. Artykuł opisuje krótki, 40-godzinny projekt skierowany do nauczycieli języków obcych mający na celu rozwój świadomości międzykulturowej, umiejętności oraz postaw poprzez działania dramowe i teatralne.

**Słowa kluczowe:** drama, nauczanie języków obcych, komunikacja międzykulturowa, kompetencja komunikacyjna.

## Introduction

The call to integrate intercultural knowledge and competence into the heart of education is an imperative born of seeing ourselves as members of a world community, knowing that we share the future with others. Intercultural communication is one of the key 21st-century competence we need to develop in our society.

Learning a foreign language is an intricate process involving not only mastering an object of academic study, but more appropriately focused on learning a means of communication, acquiring the new languages of the body, behaviour and understanding of culture customs. Language is a product of the thought and behaviour of a society. Effectiveness in a foreign language is directly related to understanding of the culture of that language (Taylor, 1979). Communication in its deep conceptualization in the real and given situations is never out of context — and because culture is a part of context, communication is seldom culture-free. It is today widely underlined that language learning and learning about target cultures cannot realistically be separated (Kramsch, 1993; Valdes, 1986). The interdependence of language learning and culture learning is so evident that we may even say that language learning is culture learning and consequently the language teaching is culture teaching. Foreign language teachers should be aware of the place of cultural studies within foreign teaching and try to enhance and stimulate students' culture awareness and improve their intercultural communication competence. Drama and theatre are very much culture-rooted and seem to be the best remedy for language teachers.

Language cannot be regarded just in narrow linguistic sense with no regard to its social and cultural contexts and it is quite visible that problems in cross-cultural communication are rather cultural than linguistic in origin. It is emphasized in linguistics that to be able to use a language effectively one must possess not only linguistic skills but also the ability to use language appropriately within the given socio-cultural context. As Ronowicz (1999, p. 5) puts it, language is always tied to the cultural framework of the social group that is using it and: "Successful communication depends to large extent on such things as what the content of the utterance actually refers to, which of the grammatically correct words, phrases or sentence patterns suit a given situation, and which do not, when to say things and how or, for that matter, whether to say anything at all."

For effective international dialogue and cooperation, knowledge of other countries and their cultures is as vital as proficiency in the lan-

guages (Declaration of the European Cultural Foundation and the International Council for Educational Development, 1981). It seems crucial that foreign language learners should become interculturally aware of both their own culture and, more importantly, that of others; otherwise, they will interpret the foreign language messages based on their own cultures, whose intended meanings might well be interpreted on different cultural grounds and frameworks. So culture as having different meanings shall be based on its specific framework and presented to the language learners in its own turn.

Communicative competence, which is divided into the aspects of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences (Canale, Swain, 1980), can be too general a term and in part insufficient unless it is accompanied with intercultural competences, a concept which has been widely used in social psychology and studies of communication (Wisemar, Koester, 1993). In the fields of psychology and communication, this term — intercultural competence — is seen as social effectiveness (the ability to achieve instrumental as well as social goals) and appropriateness (accepted communication in a given cultural milieu). It has been defined in foreign language learning as the ability of a person to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign culture (Mayer, 1991). Drama can provide a safe platform to exercise the skills needed for intercultural competence

## Communicative competence

Communicative competence refers to a learner's ability to use language to communicate successfully. Canale and Swain (1980) defined it as composing competence in four areas:

- Words and rules,
- Appropriacy,
- Cohesion and coherence,
- Use of communication strategies.

Communicative competence may be defined as the overall internal capability of an individuals to develop interactions and social judgment. This ability is particularly important in foreign language teaching. Hymes maintained that linguists, desiring to decipher foreign language acquisition, must take into consideration the way in which not only grammatical competence, but also the ability to use language appropriately is

acquired. Thus, he commenced to emphatically focus on sociolinguistic competence and this concept turned to serve as fundamental to the development of communicative language teaching where there was a great transfer from description of first language acquisition and communication to the description of aims and objectives of foreign language teaching.

Van Ek (1986) presents what he calls a framework for comprehensive foreign language learning objectives, which are explicitly developed in the context of this view of how FLT must be justified through its contribution to learners' general education. He emphasizes that FLT is not just concerned with training in communication skills, but also with the personal and social development of the learner as an individual. Therefore, his framework indicates reference to 'social competence', 'the promotion of autonomy', and 'the development of social responsibility', which are perhaps inherent in the original discussions of communicative competence, but certainly not central and explicit. Drama is the medium which develops both social and individual competences and skills through enhancing cooperation and emotional involvement in the role.

Van Ek's model of 'communicative ability' (Ek, 1986), cited in Byram (1997), comprises six 'competences', together with autonomy and social responsibility. The model Van Ek proposes looks like what has come below (Byram, 1997):

1. Linguistic competence: the ability to produce and interpret meaningful utterances, which are formed in accordance with the rules of the language.
2. Sociolinguistic competence: the awareness of ways in which the choice of language forms is determined by such conditions as setting, relationship, etc.
3. Discourse competence: the ability to use appropriate strategy in the construction and interpretation of texts.
4. Strategic competence: when communication is difficult, we have to find ways of 'getting our meanings across' or of 'finding out what somebody means; these are communication strategies, such as rephrasing, assigning for clarification.
5. Socio-cultural competence: socially and culturally, languages are differently framed. Being in one specific cultural or social situation or trying to master it outside the context requires a specific reference frame, and
6. Social competence: involves both the will and the skill to interact with others, involving motivation, attitudes, self-confidence, empathy and the ability to handle social situations.

Communicative competence draws on how one second language learner uses his second language command and what he in different settings

and interactions utters as appropriate; however, linguistic awareness may never be sufficient unless it is along with cultural awareness.

## Intercultural communicative competence

It has already been stated that cultural awareness is a key component of intercultural competence in overall foreign language speaker ability.

The qualifications and skills required of 'the sojourner' (Byram, 1997) can be the componential elements of what to call "Intercultural Communicative Competence." This idea promotes the notion of communicative competence, but in more significant ways. Foreign language teaching is expected to contribute to the development of what 'a sojourner' requires to successfully communicate with others, but a student is more than a sojourner in that he/she is solely dependent on the school or institution where he/she is learning the elements of communication in 'other' language. There might be claims that a student can confront other cultures through such other subject matters as geography, history, etc., but it can be stated that second language teaching has the experience of otherness at the centre of its concern, as it requires learners to engage with both familiar and unfamiliar experience through the medium of another language. Furthermore, as Byram (1997) notes, foreign language teaching has a central aim of enabling learners to use that language to interact with people for whom it is their preferred and natural medium of experience, those we call native speakers, as well as a means of coping with the world for all concerned. Foreign language acquisition is therefore concerned with communication, but this also has to be understood as more than the exchange of information and sending of messages, which has dominated communicative language teaching in recent years. Even the exchange of information is dependent on understanding how what one says or writes will be perceived and interpreted in another cultural context; it depends on the ability to de-centre and take up the perspective of the listener or reader. However successful, communication is not judged solely in terms of efficiency of information exchange but it is focused on establishing and maintaining relationships. In this sense, the efficacy of communication depends on using language to demonstrate one's willingness to relate, which often involves the indirectness of politeness rather than direct and efficient choice of language full of information. There is variation in the focus of different models of teaching

intercultural competence. Byram (1997) and Seelye (1993) look at the teaching of intercultural communication in the context of foreign language teaching. Others, such as Hoffstede (1991) and Bennett (1998) concentrate specifically on intercultural communication.

## Hofstede's model

Hofstede (1991) suggests that intercultural competence is built in three stages: awareness, knowledge and skills. First learners must recognize that their own behaviour is conditioned by the culture that they have become a part of when growing up in a particular society, and that others are in just the same way differently conditioned by the different cultures that they grew up in. Second, they must learn about the particular culture they are going to interact with. They need to learn the language and they should acquire knowledge of the overt cultural manifestations and basic differences in underlying values of the target culture and of their own culture. Third, the learners must apply the knowledge of the target culture and put it to practice in the target culture environment. Hofstede (1991) makes a clear separation between cultural awareness and language teaching and he proposes that cultural awareness is to be learned independently. Only as a result of cultural awareness is a student capable of utilizing culture specific knowledge in a constructive way and through the experience within another culture the student can reach intercultural competence.

## Byram's model

Byram (1991) has a completely different approach suggesting that language and culture teaching should be combined to achieve a significant change in learners' perception so they gain intercultural competence instead of monocultural awareness. Byram claims that foreign language teaching should consist of four elements: language learning, language awareness and culture experience and culture awareness. All these elements support one another and are adjoined to one another.

## Bennett's model

Bennett's (1999) approach to intercultural communication training concentrates on the development of *ethnorelativism*. Bennett (1999) associates *ethnocentric* perception with the feeling of sympathy. Bennett (1999) presents a learning process that involves the learner in a constructive experience. Bennett (1999: 2) proposes a six step model for the development of empathy skills. The steps to be taken are: 1) Assuming Difference, 2) Knowing Self, 3) Suspending Self, 4) Allowing Guided Imagination, 5) Allowing Emphatic Experience, and 6) Re-establishing Self.

## Drama and intercultural competence in the language acquisition

Teaching a foreign language is a process of interaction and communication between student and teacher, which reflects their various emotional and intellectual states. Learning a foreign language requires, however, more than language input; students need real-life practice in cultural context. The fact that drama helps to bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world makes drama one of the most flexible, effective and enjoyable ways of teaching and also the most culture-rooted one. A great deal of language learning takes place through relatively informal, unplanned imitation and use in actual communication situations. Spontaneous human interaction involves intention, authenticity and unpredictability. In this way, the conversation resembles situations in which children acquire their native language in unfamiliar situations.

Improvement of the oral competence of second language learners is partly attributed to the fact that dramatic activities make language more meaningful. Drama provides the opportunity to look beyond words towards meaning as it surrounds language with a context. As a result, forms and structures become meaningful and students understand their appropriate use.



## Methodology

The pilot undertaken research was exploratory and qualitative. The main aims of the project were:

1. To increase teachers' knowledge about different cultures.
2. To examine the role culture plays in both verbal and nonverbal communication.
3. To develop tolerance and empathy towards "strangers" and a deeper understanding of different beliefs and values.
4. To change the attitude of teachers towards unknown, learning how to react in improvised situations.
5. To learn to accept others' emotional states.
6. To stimulate creativity by exploring different responses.

## Participants

Participants were teachers of foreign languages ( $N = 30$ ) working with different age groups and different competency level; among them 70% were female and 30% were male. Participants age ranged from 25 to 45 years.

## Method

30 teachers took part in a 40-hour drama project which was carried out by drama specialists. After the workshops the teachers were given the evaluating questionnaire with 32 closed and semi-open questions which were focused on evaluating teachers' intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes they mastered during the drama workshops. The questions were divided into three modules:

- Knowledge about culture,
- Intercultural skills,
- Attitudes.

During the workshops the random interviews with participants were additionally carried out.



## Results

There was an exceptionally high rate of satisfaction among teachers participating in drama workshops measured on the scale 1–6 (1 was very poor and 6 was very satisfying). 75% of the group evaluated the workshops as very satisfying and 25% as satisfying, there were no negative responses. The answers given to the questions referred to the first module — *knowledge* showed that teachers learnt more about different cultures, their systems of values and rules (78%), they understood the notion of cultural distance (69%), gained a better awareness of different nonverbal codes in different cultures (63%), got better insight into own cultural rules and biases (48%). The second module referred to skills and teachers pointed out that drama and theatre workshops increased their ability of emotional involvement in a new cultural context (87%), they learnt to recognize intellectual and emotional dimensions of different points of view linked to the cultural roots (76%), gained an ability to recognize the behaviour caused by a different culture (63%), increased their sociolinguistic competence understanding the relation between the language and its meaning in the social context (51%). The last module included questions about teachers' attitudes. Most participants of the project underlined the enormous impact drama made on their intercultural empathy (89%) and understanding of different cultural and social contexts (76%). They mentioned also that their curiosity went up (67%) and their openness toward people from different cultures (54%). The random interviews made with the participants during different stages of a 40-hour project also confirmed the role drama and theatre can play in developing the intercultural communication. They highlighted the unique possibility drama gives to develop empathy through integration of different identities one can play during drama. It can be acquired through acceptance of others and changing a point of view, which leads to empathy. Empathy is a skill in itself which underpins inter- and intra-cultural communication (Aden, 2010) so vital in foreign language acquisition.

## Discussion

The use of drama in the foreign language classroom usually aims to engage participants in the fictional events deeply enough to create spon-

taneous and authentic language use (Wagner, 1998, p. 8) thus fostering language learning. The focus there is largely on increasing the learners' linguistic ability. Participation in drama creates a possibility for a new understanding of the students' own as well as other people's lives. Drama is an extremely powerful medium of teaching and changing attitudes towards different culture. It enables a profound dialogue in fictional context through improvisation and play. Drama allows to develop a participant on two levels personal and social. The impact of drama is also proved by research done by neuroscientists about the way the human brain learns most effectively. There are new links made between the imagination, high quality learning, high quality thinking processes and process drama. Drama is highly motivating, multi-sensory and active, links learning cognitively and affectively and is very much culture-rooted. Drama has roots in imitation and mimicry (the first learning style) and then through dramatic play, which is holistic and helps develop strong neural pathways for learning and understanding a different culture.

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