Basic aspects of intercultural communication in English

The world has been changing rapidly economically and politically. The emerging global economy is both competitive and interdependent. It reflects the availability of modern communications and production technologies. The increasing globalisation is forcing companies to pay more attention to international developments and international communication. Domestic firms have to adjust their structures and methods of operating to changing economic environment as a lot of their suppliers and customers are located in various continents. Numerous joint ventures cross national boundaries. The competitive demands of governments, industries, and corporations both national and multinational, require an understanding of English.

Effective international communication is the effective use of language combined with an understanding of different behaviour patterns influenced by the value system of different cultures. To be a successful communicator it is necessary to be provided with the knowledge of cultural background of future business partners not only in Europe, but also in other continents, where people’s values are different in a lot of aspects, their religion and organisation of society being the most significant ones (Mezulánik 1999: 297-305).

M. Byram suggests defining intercultural communicative competence for citizens of Europe as linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competences combined with intercultural competence. The future communicators within EU therefore need the knowledge, attitudes and skills related to intercultural interaction, i.e. linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics and cultural awareness. They must have skills and attitudes involving the ability to place an event in context, awareness of own ideological perspectives and values and awareness of potential conflict and ability to establish common criteria, and where it is not possible because of incompatibilities in belief and value systems, ability to negotiate agreement on conflict and acceptance of difference.
According to K. Jaeger teaching intercultural communication means teaching culture in relation to intercultural encounters, stressing the necessity of learning more about and becoming more conscious of one’s own cultural background. Teaching culture can also be defined as a contribution to the didactics of international communication, comprising the variety of didactic research and development aiming at preparing the intercultural actor to take part in the intercultural encounter. The didactics of intercultural communication is a new research discipline which has interdisciplinary character as it draws its theoretical background from a wide range of disciplines – linguistics, foreign language pedagogy, sociology, anthropology and ethnology.

International competence in the opinion of A. Jensen is a list of partial competencies and the basic qualifications needed for acting in intercultural situations. The author distinguishes two approaches:

1. Appropriate behaviour – the social skills approach – involves the ability to display appropriate behaviour when meeting another culture, conforming to the conventions of the country and simulating being a member of that community. The social skills approach traditionally emphasises the training of non-verbal communication, mimics, gestures, degree of eye contact, distance between interlocutors, degree of body contact, etc. Training focuses on the pragmatic aspects of the linguistic proficiency – politeness, conversational structures and the importance of impact of speech styles.

2. Personal attitude – the holistic approach – raises the question of attitude towards other cultures in general and to the specific culture in particular. Intercultural competence becomes a set of more general skills comprising the affective aspects related to cultural contact. This method is going beyond the external, cognitive aspects of learning another culture through the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the culture systems. Besides the intellectual skills the basic principle for reaching mutual understanding and for establishing intercultural relations is a positive attitude towards others and an openness towards different value systems. Language is regarded as part of the culture – the linguistic signs are only the most visible part of the foreign culture, therefore it is not sufficient to study the language in order to develop an understanding of the culture.

**International negotiating styles**

Comparing important different has become the focus of research within intercultural communication. G. Hofstede and S. Weiss have conducted significant research in the field of culture’s effects on business attitudes, especially on the negotiation process. Hofstede’s research resulted in identifying the four main dimensions in which cultures differ by means of statistical analysis and theoretical reasoning – Power Distance, Individualism, Uncertainty Avoidance and Masculinity. The four dimensions show some significant correlations with geographic, economic, demographic, and political national indicators. Each of these areas has particular importance for negotiating across cultures.

1. Power distance dimension measures the way individuals relate to authority at work in different cultures. High power distance cultures mandate respect for age and seniority, the style of management is paternalistic, hierarchy is regarded as important (Latin America, Russia, South Asia, some Arab countries).

In low power distance cultures differences in status are less apparent (U.S.A., Great Britain, Scandinavia).
2. The dimension of individualism refers to the orientation that people in different countries have toward their work. Individualistic cultures are task-oriented, individuals are self-motivated and seek individual appraisal and reward. Collectivist cultures are motivated by their desire to advance the interests of the group, they seek reward for the group. Americans expect their Japanese partners to make decisions at the negotiating table, the Japanese are surprised to find individual members of the American team promoting their own ideas, sometimes contradicting one another.

3. The dimension related to uncertainty avoidance measures the comfort or discomfort people in different countries feel in the presence of uncertainty. In high uncertainty avoidance cultures people want to avoid ambiguous situations. The decisions are made slowly and carefully after consideration of all possible details. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures have more tolerance of ambiguity and differences. The USA have a low need for certainty. Among the countries with the lowest needs are Jamaica, Hong Kong and Singapore, i.e. they like more risk-taking.

4. Masculinity dimension is based on the degree to which cultures value gender-associated qualities. More masculine cultures tend to favour a sharp division of sex roles. More feminine cultures tend to value the relationship quality-of-life values. The values are shared by men and women. The style of working in masculine cultures may be more competitive, while in feminine cultures more collaborative.

Hofstede’s research has resulted in international negotiating styles. However, the forty countries, where the research was conducted, do not involve many Eastern European cultures. The cultures of Austria and Germany were geographically and historically the closest analysed countries to the Czech Republic. This leads to the necessity of similar research which would summarise the knowledge concerning cultural values and their impact on behaviour of people living in some countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

F. Trompenaars attempted to distinguish deeper differences influencing behaviour of people in intercultural communication. In his opinion cultural background leads to automatic solution of frequently repeated problems, i.e. attitude to other people, attitude to time and to nature. Within the mentioned three areas Trompenaars distinguishes seven basic cultural dimensions, several of which are identical with G. Hofstede’s dimensions and several are different, for example neutral and emotional cultures and cultures with internal and external orientation.

A. Thomas insists that cultures influence goals of negotiating, the ways of reaching them and the range and contents of steps in negotiating. Therefore partners with different culture background are supposed to take into consideration cultural standards of their own culture, estimate the standards of the target culture, presume the partner’s behaviour and his/her expectations related to the home culture. Discrepancies within the listed dimensions may consequently lead to misunderstanding, negative reactions, and even to culture shock.

The mentioned above concepts of culture standards as the basis for international negotiating styles have been criticised, especially due to their potential threat of stereotyping and their lack of dynamism. Nevertheless, the cultural standards show advantages concerning structuralisation of social situations, transparency, easy understanding and application in the conditions of intercultural training.
Business English syllabi in School of Business Administration

School of Business Administration in Karviná, Silesian University, provides education for future business professionals capable to work in new conditions. With regard to the perspectives of joining the European Union, teaching foreign languages and communication subjects in Czech has been devoted great attention. The students have to cover five semesters of the first and the second language communication and subjects related to theory of communication, rhetoric and communication strategies and tactics in their mother tongue. Recently, new syllabi for the final specialised parts of the FL curriculum have been introduced, e.g. FL for Banking and Finance, FL for Tourism, Business Correspondence, Case Studies in Business, Communicating in the Business World and European Union. The goal of the mentioned courses for business communication is not only developing speaking, listening, writing and reading skills, but also understanding business situations and cognitive processes associated with them as well as awareness of cross-cultural perspectives, especially social and cultural presumptions for cooperating in united Europe. It is necessary to focus on the theory of cultures, including the process of acculturation, intercultural conflict and its solving, non-verbal aspects of communication, and the results of research carried out in numerous areas.

The Czech-Turkish research and its results

The School of Business Administration has been involved in cooperation between the Silesian University and the Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University in Turkey. Due to this initiative numerous ways how to conduct cultural research in a Muslim country have emerged. A project of the Turkish Department of Foreign Languages and the Czech Department of Communication has been designed. In the initial stage the researchers distributed questionnaires to the students of English both in Canakkale and in Karviná. The cooperation with Turkish Cannakale Onsekiz Mart University means significant contribution to exchanging intercultural information with the nation whose political, social and religion attitudes have not been researched yet, particularly, in comparison with Czech and other Slavonic cultures.

The researchers presumed that intercultural differences would be related to the following areas:
- religion
- society and family
- education system
- attitude toward events
- relationship between men and women
- food
- language.

Several models for the analysis of culture were considered when creating the inter-cultural questionnaire. The models attempt to define the types of questions which should be included in such a questionnaire. They offer an opportunity for culture study and provide the basic information about key cultural areas which could be subjected to various kinds of interviewing. The following questionnaire for Turkish students of English at Canakkale
Onsekiz Mart University and for Czech students at School of Business Administration combines elements overtaken from some models, corresponding to the initial stage of research and the target community. The following questionnaire was distributed to the students of the 3rd year of the School of Business Administration.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1 male             female (Circle one)

2 Years studying English: ____________
   Type of school or other institution:_____________________________________

3 In your opinion, what is the level of your English? (Circle one)
   minimal         poor           fair         good           very good             excellent

4 How many native English speakers do you know personally? Where have you met them?_________________________________________________________

5 How does studying English contribute to your knowledge about foreign cultures?

6 What do, in your opinion, European nations know about Czech culture? Mention at least three facts.

7 What do, in your opinion, European nations know about Turkish culture? Mention at least three facts.

8 Turkish culture is different from European cultures. (Circle one)
   disagree strongly            disagree slightly              agree slightly             agree strongly

9 List six most important values Czech and Turkish cultures are based on according to priority (e.g. family, money, social status, religion, etc.)

10 What are Czech and Turkish eating habits that are different from other countries? List 3 differences at least

11 Which days of the calendar year are officially designated as national festivals in the CR and Turkey? What are the central themes of these occasions and what is the manner of their celebration?

12 In what individual hobbies are Czech and Turkish young people likely to engage? List three at least.

13 What careers have strong appeal for the young people in the CR and Turkey? How important is parental example and advice in the choice of a career?

14 Write five associations you have when thinking of Turkey

15 Choose one of them and describe it in more details.

1 There were 16 females and 11 males among 27 respondents.
2 The average duration of English learning was 8.7 years, the longest 12 years, the shortest 7 years.
3 The students acquired the knowledge of English in primary schools, secondary schools and university.
4 Most students (18) consider their knowledge good, 3 students very good and 6 students fair. The students met native speakers during the university study (12), during their stays at international camps in GB and the USA (8) and seven students have not met any native speakers yet.

5 Studying English contributes especially to the students' knowledge of English speaking countries (12), about other nationalities (9), four students can see only small contribution and two students cannot see any contribution.

6 Among the facts that are known to European nations the students list especially beer, hockey, football, Prague and Czech cut glass. Some students also mentioned V. Havel, Charles IV, Gypsy problem, Skoda car, future membership in the EU, the year 1989 and becherovka.

7 European nations in the students' opinion know that prevailing religion in Turkey is Islam and that Turkish culture is mixture of European and Asian cultures. Among other facts there were listed mosques, Ankara, carpets, seaside, human laws, joining the EU, position of women, “Turkish honey”, etc.

8 In answers to question 8 the students think that Turkish culture is different from other European countries (9 agree strongly, 13 agree slightly, 3 disagree slightly, 2 disagree strongly).

9 In the students' opinion Czech culture is based mainly on family, then money and social status. They also mention other values - health, good job, education, freedom, and religion. Turkish culture is based on religion, family and social status (other mentioned values listed according to priority are money, freedom and education).

10 The students consider the most significant Czech eating habit drinking beer, eating pork and dumplings and shortage of fruit and vegetables. They suppose that Turkish cuisine can be characterised by a lot of fruit and vegetables, spices, seafood, rice, no pork, no alcohol, coffee and tea.

11 Among the most important national festivals in the CR the following occasions were listed according to priority: October 28, July 5 and 6, Christmas, May 1 and 8, New Year and Easter. Only a few students mentioned Student's Day and Revolution in 1989. Nine students did not know anything about Turkish festivals, but several presumed that there must be mainly religious festivals. Twelve students knew the date of the Turkish national holiday of the foundation of the republic - October 29 (thanks to the lecture delivered by a Turkish lecturer), a few students mentioned Ramadan, but a few supposed that the Turkish also celebrated Christmas, Easter and New Year (but not on 1 January).

12 Answers to this question seem to be similar both in the Czech Republic and in Turkey. The students mentioned especially sport, music, reading, dancing, computers and going to the pub.

13 The students agreed that both in the CR and in Turkey priority is given to well-paid jobs, like lawyer, economist, doctor, manager and sportsman. They suppose that parental advice is taken into consideration more by the Turkish students than by the Czech ones.

14 Among the most frequently listed associations were Islam, different culture, the sea, earthquake, football, Istanbul, but several students also mentioned mosques, Ottoman Empire, human rights, fairy-tales, carpets and football.

15 Only a few students were able to provide more information about Islam, Czech help during the earthquake, fairy-tales, football matches and carpets.
Conclusion

We presume that the mentioned Czech-Turkish project, and especially the use and the results of the questionnaire technique, will significantly contribute to the possibility of comparing the two cultures in the chosen areas. The further steps of the project would focus on expanding the target community to business people, which could result in contribution to international negotiating styles. The results of monitoring and evaluating the project will be published in the articles and some of them have already been incorporated into the textbook for the English communication course European Union for School of Business Administration and a similar course for the students of Onsekiz Mart University in Canakkale.

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