



Language Teaching Tomorrow

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The first issue of Language Teaching Tomorrow was published in connection with the 2nd International Week for Language Teachers organised in May 2015 in Tampere and Jyväskylä, Finland, by JAMK University of Applied Sciences and Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK).

The aim of the journal is to offer language teachers in higher education the opportunity to share best practices, publish research results and have an up-to-date view on what is happening in language education around the world.

Language teaching in higher education is, like all education, changing constantly. The students and the working life have greatly different needs now than they did 10 years ago, and they will surely have different needs 10 years from now. Teachers need to constantly transform their education to meet the new demands placed by the changing world, technology and communication.

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Development of intercultural communicative competence awareness tools and teaching material for Languages for Specific Purposes courses

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Abstract

Research on language teaching of larger global lingua francas like French, Spanish or English emphasize the need to consider cultural diversity and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) since learners are likely to use their foreign language with non-native speakers of different nationalities. In addition to common lingua franca variables such as different accents, pragmatic expectations, and discursal patterns, recent research highlights the development of tools to assess ICC in training courses and teaching material. This paper proposes the development of ICC material and assessment tools for LSP courses and adapt methodologies and contents to these new demands and requirements.

Introduction

Recent research on language teaching emphasizes the need to take into consideration the ability to adapt to any culture and therefore, have intercultural communicative competence (ICC) since in the current context of international communication, people are more likely to interact in a foreign language (FL) with non-native speakers of different nationalities.

In addition to the most common lingua franca context variables such as different accents, different pragmatic expectations, and different discourse patterns (Beamer, 1992; Byram, 1997), there is an emphasis on the awareness of the intercultural dimension of foreign language education, and the development of tools to assess this dimension towards ICC development of training courses and teaching material.

The new university system after the convergence into the European Higher Education Area requires the definition of the professional profiles that society demands, analyze the required skills for such

professionals and accordingly design the curriculum with the necessary contents and subjects. What seems to be clear is that “To compete globally, persons must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to behave in a manner becoming to a specific culture” (Committee for Economic Development, 2006: 4).

Industrial Engineering in particular is an advanced degree with a generalist profile that allows graduates to carry out professional activities in any technological field and allows them to be prepared for the rapid evolution of technology. Graduates are therefore prepared to occupy positions of responsibility, and will be in charge of aspects such as the progress and technological innovation of enterprises.

Therefore, this research work attempts to engage FL students and instructors in the design and development of ICC material and cultural awareness assessment tools in order to produce a common strategy to design and improve Languages for Specific Purposes courses and adapt methodologies and contents to these new demands and requirements.

In particular, this paper proposes a reflection around the key constituents of intercultural communication through group work and brainstorming techniques to design an assessment tool tailored to the needs of the industrial engineer of the 21st century.

Intercultural communicative competence definition and components

The term competence in the professional field is defined as the possession of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to exercise a profession, successfully, autonomously and flexibly, and participate in the professional environment and work organization.

A quick consultation of the literature reveals the complexities in the definition of communication competence (Shuang Liu, 2012: 270). According to Fantini (2009:456), intercultural competence may be defined as the complex abilities required to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different. Likewise, from the language teaching approach, Byram (1997:7) defines ICC as “an individual’s ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries.” Thus, terms such as *intercultural competence*, *intercultural effectiveness*, *cultural intelligence*, *international competence* and *intercultural adaptation* seem to be fully exchangeable to refer to the same idea (Fantini, 2009: 456; Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009: 9)

Among the components, Byram and Morgan (1994:135) identify three inter-related areas in ICC assessment: ‘knowledge’, ‘attitudes’, and ‘behaviour’. Other authors like Fantini (2009: 456) include four dimensions: knowledge, (positive) attitudes (or affect), skills, and awareness.

Some assessment instruments focus on language rather than cultural aspects. Other instruments stress international rather than intercultural and thereby exclude differences within national boundaries; still others are simply ambiguous and their intent is unclear (Fantini, 2009: 456). The Intercultural Communication Institute (<http://www.intercultural.org>) provides a list of selected assessment tools with twelve of the most common tools available, among them: the *Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory*

used in training, consulting, and program evaluation; the *Discovering Diversity Profile* that helps employees explore their level of comfort in several Diversity Dimensions; the *Diversity Awareness Profile*, a 40-item instrument that assesses how respondents' actions affect people of different cultural, gender, or ethnic backgrounds; the *Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory* that measures how people respond to conflict; the *International Mobility Assessment* used in the process of international assignment decisions; or the *Intercultural Readiness Check* which contains information from more than 5,500 respondents and is one of the largest information sources on intercultural competence in the world.

These tools clearly reveal that although the core concept of interculturality is present in all of them, assessment instruments need to be adapted to specific users' needs and that any comprehensive measure would undoubtedly be multidimensional in nature (Committee for Economic Development, 2006: 9).

ICC assessment tool design for industrial engineers

With this background in mind, and with special focus on the concepts of ICC components and the multidimensional approach, an experiment was carried out with 100 industrial engineering students to identify other components not usually found in ICC assessment tools and adapted to professional industrial engineering contexts.

Students were given a blank survey that included only the headings with the three ICC dimensions related to language learning: Attitude, Knowledge and Behaviour (Byram and Morgan 1994) plus one specifically designed for industrial engineering professional environments, and were asked to add features to the four dimensions in an interactive groups activity. The objective was twofold, on one hand, students had the possibility to interact and discuss with each other the design of the ICC survey, and on the other, to be aware of the most common features of intercultural communication competence.

Conclusions

Findings revealed that most participants were aware of cultural differences and stereotyping, and expressed that knowledge of the language alone is not guarantee of success in an international professional environment. The analysis also revealed the inclusion of concepts such as globalization, multilingualism, foreign language and a different approach to adaptation, that is, communication problems, thus by being interculturally competent misunderstandings and problems can be avoided.

What is more interesting from this experiment is the fact that participants highlighted a strong association between intercultural communication and foreign languages, and the use of intercultural communication competence as a mean to learn languages.

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