

THE HUMAN COEXISTENCE – UNDERPINNED BY LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

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Identities: national, ethnic, cultural

Being the continent of national states, the social structure of the archipelago Europe is based on the ethnic origins of its population. This feature alone makes it impossible to be compared with any other part of the world. National diversity and cultural specificity have been preserved by the geographical knowledge and the historical memory used to strengthen a European's diverse identity: national, cultural, regional, etc. The awareness of one's own past – the historical memory – is not only an irreplaceable resource but also a tool for building the future for European citizens. In view of their political dynamics, the differences as well as correlations between individual European areas have become clearer. At the same time, the tendencies to establish intercultural connections have become more intense.

It is assumed that knowing and understanding cultural habits of other social and national environments is a precondition for the awareness of one's own identity and for the formation of comparisons which finally makes the creation of values possible.

An individual is also and above all a constituent part of a group, a society, a nation. It is due to the cultural intertwinement and linguistic diversity of the modern world society that its functioning cannot be imagined without the ethnic awareness of individuals and groups. In this regard, it is only on the basis of mutual understanding that various national communities are able to comprehend the specificities of other communities and mutually interact without prejudice. Apart from the frequently emphasised importance of awareness of who is who and where they belong, not only introspection but also an outside perspective is equally important. The areas where cul-

tures, languages, civilisation goods and the historical memory meet are the laboratories of Europeism and hence a touchstone of the coexistence policy of the European Union. Civilisation contact areas (especially border areas) can transmit knowledge and new understandings of the importance and role of cultural and ethnic intertwining to other environments. Moreover, in cooperation with other similar environments, they can solve problems and processes of coexistence, compare their influence at national level, and transmit experiences also to a wider European and global territory. It is here that questions of historical development of areas emerge, as well as problems regarding the formation of national and local authorities, provincial and state units; the effects of political transformations on the development of the socio-cultural structure of regional, ethnic and linguistic communities; intertwining and interaction between social and cultural units, art and science, civil society and economy; preservation and transmission of values in the process of passive and active integration of individuals and groups into the social corpus of Europe as a community. That makes investments of the European Union and the national states into the research of the social tissue and humanistic traditions of Europe important. In this view, historical, sociological and intercultural, anthropological-ethnic and other similar studies have been recognised as an essential part of the research encouraged and financially supported by the European Commission.

The research of natural and cultural heritage, for example, remains a permanent task not only of the humanities but also of certain social and natural sciences. However, in light of the challenges of a wider world context, apart from the existing contacts between related fields of expertise also closer interdisciplinary connections between distant fields of humanities, social and natural sciences must be established, including the ones that have not yet been tested. As for the disciplines, organizationally remaining within the established limits, research should be oriented towards broader problems while transmitting the knowledge of natural and cultural heritage also to a wider international community. In order for it to be comprehensively preserved, cultural heritage of individual social environments must be integrated into daily life and consciousness of people as part of their living environment and economic activity. To create appropriate environment for the economic success of individual states, the values of innovation, creativity and invention are of essential importance.

In the framework of this study, it must be emphasised that a major part of cultural heritage consists of language and the spiritual as well as material culture. Languages, regardless of their position, are not only a

universal ingredient of the cultural heritage of Europe as a whole, but also the constitutive landmarks of its citizens' national and cultural identity. On the basis of language and its use in its heterogeneous functions, members of a certain ethnic or national community are most easily identified. Multilingualism, i.e. knowledge and mastery not only of one's own but also of one's neighbour's, partner's, friend's language, is a primary bond in interpersonal relations in all aspects of daily life ranging from economy, politics, education and science, to philosophical thought, religious feeling and artistic expression. In view of this fact, every effort should be made to promote and comprehensively support long-term development dynamics and preservation mechanisms of European languages.

For common issues common instruments are needed. The balance between rights and duties of each individual is important and has to be regulated by a common convention. Economic, social and especially cultural rights are not just individual, but collective rights of nations, and therefore subjected to special legitimacy. Cultural rights as well as economic and social rights derive directly from international law. International (human rights) law is also their superior protection system. The most representative as well as the most authoritative document in international law is the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*¹. Its fundamental attribute is the legal obligation of governments to guarantee and assure the individuals unmolested enjoyment. This legal character is based also on the *United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*². Cultural rights embody individual and collective rights to education. In this frame, education means also to increase awareness, tolerance, friendship among nations and racial, ethnic or religious groups. Cultural rights in general enclose also other crucial aspects, such as participating in cultural life, enjoyment of the benefits of scientific progress and its applications, and to use one's own language. Not only international, but also European Law is struggling to attain these goals.

Language is the most direct expression of culture; it is what makes us human and what gives each of us a sense of identity. Article 22 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*³ states that the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. Article 21 prohibits discrimination based on a number of grounds, including language. Together with respect for the individual, openness towards other cultures, tolerance and acceptance of others, respect for linguistic diversity is a core value of the European Union. Multilingualism refers to both a person's ability to use several languages and also to the co-existence of different language communities in one geographical area. The European

Convention on Human Rights and particularly the Law of the EU set legal obligations upon States to guarantee and promote minority rights. National, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities have the unalienable right to preserve and to develop their own culture and to foster essential elements of their identity – religion, language, customs and cultural heritage; for minorities contribute to cultural variety in general. The level of respect for the cultural rights is therefore the mirror of a society.

Language and intercultural communication in life and education

The first (origin) language plays an important role in the life of any individual. It influences the formation of one's personality in the processes of identification, either as a means of expression of one's reasoning and emotions, interpretation and transfer of thoughts, or as a driving force of one's influence on the events in the outside world. Slovene language, for example, as the first language in Slovenia and in the broader Slovene cultural area is the mother tongue or the origin language of a majority of speakers, as well as the second language of many other people. It is, however, hardly ever a foreign language. It has been a state language for seventeen years with a long history of being a national language before. The geographical position and historical events have defined the ethnic structure of the Slovene space which is, while having a mostly homogeneous national structure, also multilingual and culturally intertwined in its border areas. Language and cultural diversity are assets which European integrations strategists have been trying to preserve and protect. Practical application is not the only dimension of learning and use of languages (native / origin / first, second, foreign). Language is the means that enables communication among individuals. Furthermore, communication opens up the way to tolerance and harmony between individuals and groups wishing to reach the same or similar goals. Communication between people would be possible also by using only one communicational code (it could be labelled as *lingua franca*), which would indirectly affect the relations between individual participants in the processes of cooperation, integration and exchange of social roles, but it would, however, endanger the lesser used languages and individual cultures and their features. Language planning is aimed at solving problems of the position and existence of an individual language or its genre in cases of language contact practices, if and where the implementation of such practices is wanted or required. Language planning theories include social, economic and political dimensions of the influence of external factors upon an individual who chooses and uses a

certain language code. This choice is not only influenced by one's will, but also by the political and social sensitivity of the community to the use of a certain language in contact with other languages. Using a certain language, the formation of one's national and cultural identity is facilitated also by mutual influence of external factors upon one's awareness and will.

Therefore, the mastery of first, second or foreign languages no longer suffices for successful communication and mutual understanding, since language communication involves differences and special characteristics that are expressed through the manner of transferring linguistic contents and through relations between speakers in a certain communicative situation.

What we are dealing with is intercultural language communication (Čok, 2006) that is, together with language competence and skills, the best determined means of communication from the point of view of anthropology. Yet the point at issue is not only communicating culture at a given moment, but also the uttering of contents and their meanings, as well as relations between the speakers manifested through the encounter of the speakers' cultures and languages. Language communication also involves the confrontation of various realities that surround us. Empathic competence, i.e. the power of identifying oneself mentally with (and so fully comprehend) all these realities, opens a passage to tolerant understanding of the other. During the process of growing up, when an individual develops his/her personality, two types of socialization can be distinguished: primary (taking place within the family) and secondary (in society). Both can be upgraded with tertiary socialization, which is much harder to achieve – if achieved at all. The process involves the development of the competence to assess and compare one's own experiences and values with those of other/foreign people, the turn from ethnocentrism and narrow identifications to ethno relativism, common values and the acceptance of differences existing between various groups.

On the one hand, intercultural awareness is related to the understanding of culture as an artefact of the mind (Academic Culture), and on the other hand, culture is associated with the formation of habits, relations, rules and interaction in society (anthropological component of culture). Language learning/teaching includes both. Syllabuses of higher education courses (university study programmes) often include the discussion of concepts of »high« culture (Skela, 1999: 68) placed in an ethnic or wider context. In philological programmes, the subject is often called Cultural Studies (*Civilisation, Landeskunde, Civiltà*), whereas in compulsory education, foreign language curricula lay emphasis above all on »behaviour« components of

culture and their role in communication, i.e. on culturally dependent beliefs/standpoints and influences that are received and transmitted through language. Intercultural communication and intercultural understanding/acceptance should become the general objectives of raising cultural awareness within the framework of teaching (first, second, foreign) languages. Yet when cultural concepts are discussed in the class, the target language culture should be made neutral. A favourable/hostile attitude towards a foreign language culture and the resulting acceptance/denial of this culture are a consequence of the positive/negative experience or education that an individual was faced with at school, at home or in his/her living environment.

Traditional teaching approaches place considerable emphasis on the artefacts of culture (in literature, fine arts, history), whereas the modern communicative approach to language teaching focuses on the selection of linguistic tools in various communicative situations and manner of their use. Since intercultural communication can be perceived as a further stage of the communicative approach nowadays the teaching of »Culture« also includes chapters on »behaviour culture« (cf. Tomalin, Stempelski, 1993). This new perception of culture has made differences and similarities between individual cultural environments much clearer. In order to raise our cultural awareness, we should not only observe and be familiar with differences between the given cultural environments, but also search for a means of mediation that will help us to get insight into them and to establish relations between them. Language communication is the most perfect and the easiest accessible means of transmitting culture. The knowledge of cultural norms valid in other social and ethnic environments is supposed to be a prerequisite for comparisons that eventually enable us to create our system of values.

The comparison of different cultures should be carried out with positive motivation and emotional distance. Positively oriented consideration of cultural differences and similarities implies that the individual is no longer the centre of attention and tries to avoid prejudices that would affect his/her judgement in advance (Kramsch, 1996)⁴. Intercultural language communication involves not only the knowledge of rules of linguistic communication, but also the awareness of the cultural component of these rules. The competence to distance oneself can be developed by learning the forms, approaches, behaviours and interaction effects in various cultural environments. It has to be stressed, however, that the process does not involve the alteration of differences by force or the search for general criteria and rules that would eventually lead to universal, general behaviour.

On the contrary, the differences should be revalued in a way that enables each individual to retain his/her idiosyncrasies and those characteristics that determine him/her as a cultural and social being (Kramersch, 1996)⁵.

Implication of theory and research of the possible methodology on intercultural awareness

When discussing cultural experience, one should pay attention to the multiplicity of accepted values and functions that an individual or social group has acquired through time. Yet an individual, who would like to retain his/her accepted values, is far from being static when performing activities aimed at preserving his/her values. The dynamics of his/her memory use is complemented by his/her will with which s/he strives to transform the world. In the process, s/he makes use of mediational means of higher mental functions related to cultural behaviour and practices (perception and active use of intercultural language communication, formation of active and empathic relations and positions between participants in the communicative situation, use of safeguards and incentives during participation in communication, etc.) and develops the mediational means as means of communication and behaviour related to the formation of cultural memory (Cole, 1996: 113). Cultural memory is developed through the elaboration of more complex »tools of remembering« that help create a new, deeper cultural experience, which serves as a basis for the further development of relations between individuals and groups. One of the mediational means of mental functions is language, which is linked to culture in several ways:

- Language is a manifestation of culture at a given moment and an expression of the manner through which an individual exhibits his/her cultural awareness;
- Certain cultural content is materialized through the use of language tools and verbalization;
- Language forms abstract systems of values and identities the implicit elements of which are cultural values and cultural identity.

In education it is important to examine the implications of emphasis on culture in second language learning (programs, curriculum, instruction and assessment). The outcome of such examination speaks in favour of a development of principles in a more appropriate evaluation of outcomes,

a development of new curricula and broadening of didactics in second language learning. If the appropriate vision can be developed among teachers, curriculum developers, researchers, and assessment specialists, second language programs have a unique opportunity to contribute to students' development of intercultural sensitivity. The lack of stated goals and outcomes, the absence of curricular innovation, deficient assessment tools and unfocussed learning strategies are some of the major reasons why culture learning approach has not been successfully included in language learning / teaching. In order to overcome these deficiencies, culture learning must be placed in a context where appropriate planning can take place.

There are a few frameworks for culture-centred learning to be considered as basic: Egan (1979) for general education development, Bennett (1993) for the development of intercultural sensitivity, Byram and Morgan (1994) and Kramsch (1993) for the inclusion of culture in the language classroom. The first two are based on the precepts of continuity, progression, and expansion of competence; they are dynamic and interact with the maturation levels of learners.

Since narrative is important to language development and because narrative automatically includes culture, the work of Egan (1979) cannot be ignored. Egan's four stages of development give meaning to expression in language through a link to educational growth that learners demonstrate at a particular stage:

Mythic (approximate age 4/5 to 9/10 years). Mythical thinking provides absolute accounts why things are as they are. The children's world is full of meaning by those things the child knows the best: love, hate, joy, fear, good, bad.

Romantic (approximate age 8/9 to 14/15 years). The romantic state is noticed in the development of "otherness" and the development of historical time, geographical space, physical regularities, logical relationship, and causality which come from the experience of the outside world.

Philosophic (approximate age 14/15 to 19/20 years). Characteristic of this stage is the search for the truth about human psychology, for the laws of historical development, for the truth about how societies function and how the world works.

Iconic (approximate age 19/20 through the adulthood). The students' appreciation of general schemes cannot fully accommodate all

particulars. No general scheme can reflect the richness and complexity of reality. The reference and recognition of the “other” are characteristic of this stage.

As a result of Egan’s framework linked to the maturational levels of learners, an adaptation of curricula, assessment, learning/teaching strategies to their needs, interests and characteristics should be anticipated.

Bennett’s research and application (1993) provide us with a conceptualization of cultural sensitivity. That sensitivity for Bennett is outlined in a set of six stages that lead the learner from the ethnocentric to the ethno relative perspective. The six stages of the model are classified under these two levels: under the ethnocentric denial, defence, minimization of differences; and acceptance, adaptation, and integration under the ethnocentric level.

Denial of differences is the inability of the individual to recognize cultural differences as they are not part of the individual’s world or the cultural contrasts are avoided. Bennett suggests trust, friendliness, cooperation in the learning process to develop the learners’ ability to recognize differences, to gather cultural information, to explore aspects of culturally different beliefs and behaviours.

Defence against differences operates when the individual sees the differences, but evaluates them negatively through stereotyping them. So, attention must be given to existing distinctions even within one’s own culture. The mediation of conflict has to be given through team building, cooperative activities and shared goals in developing attitudes of patience and tolerance.

Minimization of differences appears when the individual sees cultural differences but minimizes them. Intercultural skills have to be cultivated with general knowledge on culture, knowledge of one’s own culture, ability to perceive otherness with accuracy, as well as the maintenance of a non-judgemental posture.

Acceptance is the first ethno relative stage. The individual accepts cultural differences and acknowledges that other cultures provide alternative resolution to human existence can understand cultural phenomena and handle issues of cultural relativity. The skills that learners work with are knowledge of sensitivity toward the cultural context, respect for values and beliefs of others, as well as tolerance of ambiguity.

Adaptation to differences means that the individual has the ability to see through the eyes of the other, he/she is learning how to take risks, solve problems, be flexible, adapt socially and adjust to different communication patterns.

Integration of differences is the final stage. Individuals find themselves in the process of creating an adaptable identity, not based on any one culture, which allows them to evaluate situations from multiple perspectives and communicate with others. This stage is difficult to attain in the classroom, if attainable at all.

The contribution of the model is twofold. It provides challenge for the learners and support for the teacher. The content to be learned arouses curiosity, identifies intercultural skills, promotes cooperative activities, and prepares learners to function autonomously using research strategies. This high-challenge process helps teachers observe the intercultural development of their learners and evaluate learners within the developmental framework. Both Bennett's and Egan's model help us better understand how to include culture in the language classroom and provide our decision-making capacity with appropriate guidance.

The student's response to other languages and cultures forming part of his/her living environment can be related to the teacher's reflection upon language teaching or it can be regarded as a result of the method for raising the student's self-awareness in the processes of learning languages and acquiring cultural awareness. It may happen that the student's self-reflection is guided by the teacher up to the point that acculturation (adoption of a different culture) takes place through the prism of the teacher's cultural experience. Thus the teacher's reflection upon the teaching process can be influenced by his/her attitude towards the target culture, which can be too subjective. Such a situation may give rise to stereotypes of cultural traits or values related to the nation speaking the language taught, which eventually works to the disadvantage of the student. Self-reflection upon and self-assessment of cultural experience can prove to be much more constructive from the educational point of view, owing to the fact that self-reflection and the acquisition of primary cultural experience allows for the authenticity of the cognitions acquired and the possibility to exert an active influence on the process of the formation of the student's personality.

The definition of national awareness, which can be considered as a mental representation, covers the emotional, cognitive and dynamic areas. The *cognitive area* refers to individual's thoughts, concepts, judgement and assessment activities, the *emotional* to the emotions and values that the indivi-

dual assigns to his/her nation and national attributes, and the *dynamic area* to his/her aspirations to actively participate in the dynamics of happenings related to nationality.⁶ It is difficult to determine easily understood and transparent criteria for considering the phenomenon. On the basis of results of pilot introduction of the language portfolio in Slovenia (Čok, 1999) and findings of eminent researchers (Byram, 1997), the paper proposes three areas of self-reflection and self-assessment. By using the following descriptors, the portfolio user will evaluate his/her linguistic experience at the following levels: attitude to intercultural diversity; discovery of intercultural diversity and modulation of inputs; transfer of intercultural awareness to life.

Level 1: *Attitude, disposition to cultural diversity*

Cognitive attitude/abilities (Intra-cultural awareness, intercultural readiness / comprehension of intercultural context)

- *Intra-cultural/cognitive level*: Acquiring new knowledge of one's own culture. Acquiring new knowledge and awareness of the target culture and, consequently, encouraging the reflection about one's own culture.
- *Intercultural understanding* of the reality: Knowledge of otherness, heuristic approaches to languages and cultures, awareness of the socio-cultural context.

Level 2: *Discovery of diversity and modulation of inputs*

Emotional attitudes/awareness and behaviour

- *Cross-cultural/emotional (affective) level* : intercultural knowledge, reflection on one's identity, communication between two cultures (source and target) and, consequently, earning respect and learning tolerance for the new cultural context, ability to challenge and question one's own conceptual models, tolerance for ambiguity.

Level 3: *Transfer of intercultural awareness to life*

Dynamic intercultural communication and acting

- *Intercultural/dynamic level*: Response to on one's own anthropological/cultural experiences, dynamics (action) in cross-cultural referencing, ability to modify one's own beliefs (intercultural flexibility), positive attitudes and standpoints related to target cultures.

To conclude, it has to be pointed out that the descriptors are subject to change as they are in no way final. Once they have been tested on a sample of portfolio users using tables for data collection (cf. the levels of intercultural awareness), it will be much easier to create a more appropriate set of descriptors, which will provide a supplement to the Common European Framework of References for Languages. The proposed methodology will enable the portfolio user to gain a deeper insight into his/her linguistic and cultural experience. By writing down and analysing his/her findings, the user will start to develop his/her intercultural sensibility and awareness, which is, needless to say, a life-long process.

On the basis of mutual knowledge of one another, various ethnic communities can comprehend and accept cultural norms of other groups and establish unbiased interaction. The competence to identify oneself mentally with other cultures (empathic competence) is often considered as one of the most important intercultural competences. To provide an example: when various national experts represent their countries in the EU, their success and efficiency also depend on their cultural knowledge, competences and skills. In other words, the level of their cultural awareness determines the manner in which they establish relations in verbal and non-verbal communication, their competence to present various subjects and their manner of participation in partnerships. Various manners of dealing with intercultural communication imply various types of interaction: various approaches at the labour market, varying distribution of linguistic inequality, different use of language at work, various roles of a certain language in the socio-economic development of society.

In settings where two languages – majority and minority language – are present economics promote minority language only in cases when this language has certain »instrumental value«; however, in cases when minority language has no such value, the argument of economics remains without any value (Novak-Lukanovič, 2002). At that stage political and social arguments have to prevail.

Intercultural dialogue – the way towards a harmonious coexistence

Humanities is about knowing humankind by understanding human beings present and exploring their past. Retelling mankind's history by exploring ancient styles of living and interpreting these from a modern point of view, applying old truths to recent beliefs is the way to improve mutual understanding. Communication and exchange of information are key issues that help to improve understanding of various economic, social and

cultural areas, which, in turn, form the most important platform for development of common strategies of the nations that have decided to follow a common route.

The pan-European treasury of culture and identities is richer than what can be seen in the individual/particular, which often offers an impoverished pattern of much nobler contents. Moreover, in achieving harmonious cohabitation among societies, it is precisely in the view of the individual (particular) and in the denial of the approaches to the common and general, that the greatest of all dangers lies. Intercultural dialogue is an insufficiently utilized tool. Opening up to the world with the exchange of cultural goods does not endanger us when we have something to offer. In fact, in the history of nations and civilisations, the exchanges of cultural goods and civilisation experiences have represented enrichment at all levels, where the symbolic value of the thinker has transcended the impact of the economist.

Upon its accession to the EU and the assumption of its responsibilities for the surveillance of the Schengen border, Slovenia acquired the status of the EU's most southern border – a geostrategic position at the junction of the Romance, Germanic and South Slavic traditions. This area of incessant processes of intercultural encounters and exchanges is a bridge between the East and the West, the North and the South. In the past, Slovenia, as the most western member of the great Slavic family of nations and languages, has accomplished its mission of keeping this strategic position. Throughout all historically critical periods it has preserved its language as well as its national and cultural identity. With the increasing openness of societies, Slovenia as well is facing new dimensions of life: the Slovenian people are gaining awareness of the diversities and, at the same time, in processes of working and living, realising the necessity of developing forms of a tolerant coexistence and creation of new common European and global values.

Full membership of Slovenia in the European Union has enabled the Slovenes living in the neighbouring countries – Italy, Austria and Hungary – to establish and diversify their relations with Slovenes living within the borders of the Republic of Slovenia. This is opening a new opportunity for the Slovene people to manifest the idea of a common Slovene cultural space, which the history has so far not been in particular favour of, under new circumstances and in a new, innovative manner. For the EU member states, integration and exchange of knowledge and experience, as well as mobility of people and ideas are essential for the promotion of knowledge, achievements, common creative inspiration and cooperation in the process of implementation of cultural and civilisation diversity of the European archipelago.

One of the great challenges of the present European reality is in the very attempt to carry out the economic and political integration under the provision of cultural diversity and thus to offer to the global public, after a century, a new civilisation model that would not equate the social-economic globalisation with the social-cultural variant of the American melting pot. This new European civilisation model will be confronted with the first test in the numerous European »contact« settings, where – apart from the issues of international contact and settling the functional social, economic and administrative issues - conditions for coexistence and mechanisms to protect cultural specificities of different peoples, as well as ethnic and language groups and stimulate social cohesion are created. Abolition of different kinds of »frontiers« will demand a major revision of traditional and ethnocentric conceptions and social behaviours (Bufon, 1997b).

Notes

- [1] Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948.
- [2] UN General Assembly, res. No. 2200 A (XXI), adopted on 16 December 1966.
- [3] Official Journal of the European Communities, 18.12.2000 364/01.
- [4] »Not just discover how things are and have been, but how they could have been or how else they could be. Neither history nor ethnography provide thus imaginative leap that will enable learners to imagine cultures different from their own« (Kramsch, 1996, in Morlicchio, 2002: 92).
- [5] »We are irreducibly unique and different and that I could have been you, you could have been me, given different circumstances – in other words, that stranger... is in us« (Kramsch, ibid.).
- [6] Musek, 1994: 23 in Gomezel Mikolič, 2000.

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