
***ICT RESOURCES. OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING STUDENTS'
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE***

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Abstract: This paper intended to provide examples of ICT resources that could be used in order to support and enhance the learning of English, at bachelor level, from an intercultural perspective. The development of intercultural communicative competence is no longer optional in a globalized society. Face-to-face interaction rules need to be replaced by netiquette rules in a virtual space since online communication has become the norm today in all career fields. The subjective turn in foreign language teaching aims to make students more aware of their own cultural programming and cultural encodings when interacting with interlocutors belonging to other cultures. This paper provided an example of efficient use of ICT resources in order to develop students' intercultural communicative competence in a technology-based medium of communication.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, foreign language learning, netiquette, ICT resources, cultural perspectives.

Theoretical underpinnings of intercultural communicative competence

In the case of pre-service teacher training, the development of students' intercultural communicative competence has become a prerequisite for becoming a true professional in this field of activity. The relevant literature written by Romanian and foreign researchers in the domain of didactics indicates that within the field of foreign language teaching the two components of language and culture should not be separated in the learning process (Kramersch 2003; Risager 2006; Bârlogeanu 2007). Still, to consider the social component of the language (Coşeriu 1999, 58) or the role of language as a social practice (Kramersch 2003, 21) implies some challenges when trying to include the cultural dimension in foreign language teaching within a formal learning context. These challenges refer mainly to aspects such as developing a consensus definition of intercultural competence across Europe, to identifying consistent teaching methods that could be applied in today's multicultural classrooms and to the lack of standardized assessment tools.

The social turn (Block 2003) or the subjective turn (Kramersch 2009) in foreign language teaching has determined both researchers and teachers to focus on the multiple ways in which the interdependence between the linguistic and sociocultural knowledge (Ochs, 1993, 14) can be made operational in the classroom. This change of paradigm in foreign language teaching aims to make students more aware of their own cultural programming and cultural encodings when interacting with individuals belonging to other cultures. Sudhoff (2010, 10) suggests that the field of foreign language education is seen as a fundamental building block in fostering intercultural communicative competence. This perspective is sustained by the intricate relationship that exists between language and culture. Because language helps people to recode new knowledge and experiences, Burr (2003, cited in Fridlund 2011, 248) states that “our ways to conceive or understand the world are thus produced and sustained in social processes in which language has considerable importance”. Even if one can talk about the need to develop intercultural competence in fields such as

business or politics where the contact with people having diverse cultural backgrounds is present on a daily basis, the field of education provides, in our opinion, a sound initial contact with the foreign language intended to be learned.

Another perspective that sustains the view on the importance of the field of foreign language education in the development of intercultural communicative competence is that provided by Byram and Esarte-Sarries (1991, 5) who conclude that it is in the learning of another language that the learner can be most effectively weaned away from an ethnocentric view of other people and cultures. This ability to gradually decentre from one's culture (Byram 1989) and to be able to reflect on cultural values in the target culture constitutes an important stage in the development of one's intercultural communicative competence. In fact, it represents a shift in attitudes which in our view lays the foundation for other components, such as intercultural knowledge and intercultural skills, to settle in. The framework adopted in this paper for developing one's intercultural communicative competence is that of Dearsdorff (2006, 2009) who identified a *Process Model of Intercultural Competence* that is comprised of attitudes, knowledge and skills, desired internal outcome, and desired external outcome.

Theoretical underpinnings on digital literacy and ICT resources

The development of the intercultural communicative competence is no longer optional in a globalized and digitalized society. Pre-service teacher training courses offered at bachelor level need to accommodate students' needs in terms of learning objectives, characteristics of the learning environment and diversity of learning resources. The Internet and the variety of information and communications technologies (ICT) could be used as pedagogical tools in order to provide tailor-made possibilities for language teaching and learning. In addition, Johnassen (1994) suggests that the Internet can be perceived as a typical constructivist learning environment since it fosters critical thinking and encourages independent learning. Therefore, ICT resources could sustain institutionalized education more efficiently. The European Education Research Association encourages research programs that intend to bring up for discussion the types of traditional and digital literacy that are needed in the New Media Age.

Nowadays, educational agenda needs to reflect the societal changes. The benefits of integrating technology within the standard curriculum are numerous. The use of ICT resources can make learning more linked to reality and can bring the world into the classroom (Vannestål, Vannestål 2013, 9) offering students the possibility to connect synchronously or asynchronously with students from other educational centres. Without a doubt, both students and teachers use ICT in order to have access to information. More and more, as Hansen and Forsman (2011, p. 169) observe, the 'role of the school to mediate information has diminished and the expectations are to develop skills that allow students to handle the flow of information they live in'. Therefore, ICT resources could be considered as tools that provide both teachers and students with a much needed leverage over pen and paper teaching resources.

Preparing students for the knowledge society implies providing them with appropriate tools to succeed such an endeavour. In the case of foreign language learning, access to ICT resources could also develop students' non-linguistic aims: i.e. how to use politeness norms

and rules in online communication, how to explore the formative value of ICT resources, how to acquire knowledge about the culture of the target language etc.

The European Commission (2013, 82) indicates in its Work Programme 2013 that ICT are critical for improving education. According to the Work Programme 2013, ICT should provide to education the following solutions:

- combine, and operate across different digital media and devices and stretch the boundaries of place, time, type and styles of active learning in the digital age;
- include rich and intuitive interfaces for teachers and students and simulations and representations for teaching, learning and communicating about the topic;
- adapt to different teaching practices and learning methods (e.g. collaborative, inquiry-based and personalised learning and 1:1 tutoring) and provide efficient support for the teacher in planning, monitoring, assessment and in the management of classroom activities.

Likewise, ICT can be used efficiently within all the components of the educational process. Because the intercultural communicative competence is a dynamic and complex competence, it should be acquired in an environment that combines the formal, non-formal and the informal educational setting. In schools, the non-formal educational setting could be made available to the students through an adequate use of technology. Moreover, it is challenging to develop entirely one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes in a formal setting since the intercultural communicative competence is a continuous and lifelong process that requires both students and teachers to have a first-hand experience with the target culture. Such a genuine experience could be made available through ICT resources: blogs, wikis, emails, social networking, collaborative writing tools, multimodal resources, learning management platforms etc. The confinement of the formal setting is replaced by an interactive space that can bring together people from all over the world who otherwise would not meet. In addition, ICT resources provide an easy access to authentic materials such as newspaper articles, songs, videos etc. These authentic materials represent a meaningful source of cultural perspectives and contribute to the development of students' intercultural communicative competence (Petruş, Bocoş 2013).

The fostering of intercultural communicative competence constitutes a challenge for 21st century education. The didactic challenge becomes more critical when teachers are faced with a multicultural group of students. Even if two interlocutors speak the same target language "they might not share the same system of cultural conceptualizations" (Sharifian 2011, 96). Therefore, the development of one's intercultural communicative competence could be regarded as a key to successfully take part, in an active manner, in today's society.

ICT resources offer both teachers and students the opportunity to explore the socio-cultural perspective of teaching foreign languages (Popescu 2007, 375-376). Besides the linguistic competence that is mainly developed by these ICT resources, the communicative and the intercultural competences are also targeted. In addition, another aspect is brought into discussion, namely digital literacy. In order to operate effectively in the information society one definitely needs to understand the value of digital technology. The rules of communication might change in this new digital environment and one should become

familiarized with internet etiquette rules, also named netiquette, that represent a set of social conventions that facilitate communication on the internet.

The European Educational Research Association (2013, 3) in its Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Horizon 2020, indicates that due to a wide digitalization of social life and the various forms of e-learning (web-learning, mobile learning etc.) there is a notable pressure for change in education. The educational spaces undergo significant changes in the Digital Age which transforms the space, time and architecture of both formal and informal learning. Thus, knowledge, skills and attitudes in a digital world need to be reshaped. Teachers, researchers and think-tanks within the field of foreign language teaching should be able to anticipate and explore the effects of the new technologies of information and communication on the learning process.

Making it happen: from theory to practice

The new technologies offer teachers, students and educational institutions the possibility to collaborate in a virtual space. Such a collaboration project is INTACT Comenius project (*Interactive Teaching Materials across Culture and Technology*) (www.intact-comenius.eu) that aims to help teachers use efficiently in the classroom the interactive technology devices. The project's aim is to develop a bank of interactive teaching materials for various subjects (foreign language learning, biology, chemistry etc.). All these resources available on an online platform would enable both teachers and students to interact with other educational institutions all over the world. INTACT is confident that international contact with students from other schools will hopefully foster a strengthening of social and cultural competencies among learners.

The target groups are comprised of educational staff (teachers in pre-school, primary and secondary education), students from pre-school to secondary schools, staff and students involved in teacher training at universities, education providers, universities and research groups etc.

Such an online database is useful for students at bachelor level because when they would become teachers they could establish connections and collaborate with different schools around the world. Several universities all over Europe (University of Education, Ludwigsburg; Complutense University, Madrid; Kecskemét College Teacher Training Faculty, St Patrick's College, Dublin; Polytechnic Institut of Bragança; Babeş-Bolyai University) are partners in this project.

Research on the type of competences that might be enhanced by the use of ICT indicates, according to Anderson and Corbell (2013, 113), that the acquired skills of reflection can certainly ‘heighten participants’ awareness of their own attitudes and help them value the attitudes and beliefs of others’. Being more reflective constitutes an important pillar in the development on one’s intercultural communicative competence.

Relevant for this paper is Deardorff’s (2006; 2010, 87) definition of intercultural communicative competence understood as “effective and appropriate behaviour and communication in intercultural settings” and the development of this competence in higher education. Deardorff (2006; 2010) suggests some relevant components that have to be acquired in order to manage efficiently and appropriately intercultural dialogue:

- attitudes: respect, openness, curiosity, interest, willingness to discover
- skills: observation, listening, evaluating, analysing, interpreting, relating
- knowledge: cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness

In our opinion, students enrolled in pre-service teacher training courses need to develop, in addition to their intercultural communicative competence, their digital literacy. Therefore, the above mentioned components undergo some changes:

- attitudes: willingness and curiosity to explore the benefits of intercultural dialogue with the help of ICT, respect towards one's interlocutors, openness towards interacting with people who have different cultural encodings etc.
- knowledge: knowledge of netiquette rules, knowledge of a variety ICT, know which ICT are reliable and can be easily used in the classroom etc.
- skills: develop skills to handle a variety of ICT, be able to find online meaningful teaching resources and adapt these to the learners' needs, be able to create and upload lessons on an online learning platform etc.

We present a short description of an activity that was created on the INTACT online platform. This activity targets the development of students' intercultural communicative competence and their linguistic competence in a foreign language. Details about the stages of the activity, the resources used and the learning objectives are indicated below.

Title of the lesson: The moral code of knights vs. the moral code of students' school

Brief overview: Learners will provide examples related to the moral codes of the knights. They compare these moral codes with the moral codes that are in force within the students' school. Learners activate their previous knowledge about life in medieval times (clothes, food, behaviour, entertainment etc.) by creating unique characters. Learners practice the imperative form of the verb. Learners have to imagine that they organize a party in Sir Arthur's castle. They design a suitable invitation to this party.

Level: 5th-6th graders

Keywords: rules, values, beliefs, food, clothes, furniture

Subject coverage: Civilisation

Language of teaching: English

Learning objectives: to write an invitation on a certain topic, to exemplify elements of cultural knowledge about medieval times

Time needed: 50 minutes

Activity description:

- *Warm-up*: Learners brainstorm ideas about moral codes. They use their tablets in order to perform this task. *Key questions for scaffolding*: What is a moral code? Can you think of some rules from your everyday lives? Which are the most common rules in our lives? Which were the most common rules in medieval times? Can you provide examples of suitable behaviour in medieval times? What can be considered as a suitable behaviour nowadays? >>*ICT resource used for this teaching stage*: <http://padlet.com/>
- *Activating background knowledge*: Students put in practice their knowledge about moral codes. *Key questions for scaffolding*: What do you already know about life in a

king's court? What they ate? What they wore? How they were to behave? How did they entertain themselves? >>ICT resource used for this teaching stage: <http://www.voki.com/>

- *Creative writing*: Organizing a party in Sir Arthur's castle. Students have to create an invitation and use vocabulary related to medieval food, clothes, furniture, behaviour etc. *Key questions for scaffolding*: What details are relevant in an invitation? Should you write the date and time of the event? Do you need a map of the location? How should you dress for this event? >>ICT resource used for this teaching stage: <http://padlet.com/>

- *Personalisation*: The Time Machine is an activity that allows students to take a leap back in time. >>ICT resource used for this teaching stage: <http://www.wikia.com/>

Collaborative aspects:

In-class collaboration

- Learners collaborate in small groups in order to design an invitation to a party
- Learners create unique characters and customize their appearance

Interschool collaboration options

- Learners can browse on the internet and look for information about moral codes in medieval times and nowadays. They can find similarities/differences between their examples using a T-chart.

One can identify many advantages of online resources, such as the one presented above: promoting active learning, increasing student engagement, enhancing students' learning autonomy, instant feedback, developing collaborative and social skills.

Conclusion

This paper stated the importance of preparing students in pre-service teacher training courses for the knowledge society in which they need to put to practice their digital literacy. One of the advantages of ICT is that these offer students a participatory role in the learning process. In an online learning platform, the need to develop students' intercultural communicative competence is paramount because one has to relate in an efficient and adequate manner to the cultural diversity and sociolinguistic encodings one is inevitably going to encounter. Without a doubt, within the field of foreign language learning, intercultural communicative competence has slowly become both for teachers and students a prerequisite component.

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