

IMPROVING INTERCULTURAL COMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THROUGH PROVERBS

*Lilia HERȚA, lector superior,
Oxana GOLUBOVSKI, lector superior*

Rezumat

Articolul dat evidențiază importanța studierii proverbelor în procesul de însușire a limbii engleze. Aspectul cultural al proverbelor are un rol important în dezvoltarea competențelor culturale și interculturale a studenților. Competența interculturală implică o competență generală curriculară centrată pe capacitatea de adaptare, toleranța, acceptarea altor opinii, flexibilitate, conștientizarea culturală împreună cu cunoașterea conceptelor.

The cultural aspect of proverbs has important implications for developing learners' cultural and intercultural competence. For quite a while now, in the language profession, it has been recognized that mastering the grammar of a language in isolation from the cultural context is not sufficient to be communicatively competent. This has led to the emergence of communicative approaches. However, these approaches have not been successful enough to bring out culturally competent language learners. As for language classroom where there is an attempt to incorporate culture teaching, the problem is that teachers usually know how to teach culture but they do not know what to teach regarding the culture. The solution suggested in order to bring the cultural aspects of communication, to achieve better understanding of the language and the perspectives of the speakers is to add Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as a distinct component to the kinds of competences involved in communicative competence and hence, to the aims of language teaching [4, p.67]. While communicative competence involves the ability to communicate in four language skills with sensitivity to genres and registers, cultural competence involves the knowledge of everyday culture, popular culture, ideas, beliefs, behavior, institutions, history, geography, literature, art, music, age, gender, class, etc. and intercultural competence involves a cross curricular general proficiency including adaptability, tolerance, accepting other views, empathy, flexibility, cultural awareness along with the knowledge of the concepts such as ethnocentricity, stereotyping, and social constructivism. Overall, the goals of ICC as stated by Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey are: to give learners intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence; to prepare them for interaction with people of other cultures; to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, values and behaviors; to help them see that such interaction is an enriching experience Therefore, the aim on the part of language learners is not to become native speakers but to become intercultural speakers, who act as mediators between two cultures, interprets and understands other perspectives [1, pp.76-80].

To illustrate intercultural communication where participants are aware of the cultural differences and perspectives, the dialogue given below can be a clear example of intercultural communication in which the interlocutors are aware of the cultural aspect of proverbs. In spite of the strong connection between proverbs and culture, to the best knowledge of the author, there are few studies that promote the use of proverbs to develop learners' cultural awareness and that illustrate how they can be incorporated. To begin with, Ciccarelli encourages teachers and students to become anthropologists with the new culture as a field of study and suggests using proverbs in English and Italian that express the same concept but use different images as a way to underscore the distinctive cultural world embedded in different languages. Based on her experience, she indicates that students usually respond enthusiastically to the various discussions stimulated by the analysis of proverbs, because most of these topics directly concern their culture, their life-style, or their perspectives on the world [2, p. 73].

Similarly, Richmond emphasizes utilizing proverbs in language classrooms particularly in teaching African languages to develop cultural awareness and communicative competence by proposing a model of target and native language proverb comparison so that teachers can select proverbs to better reflect the similarities and differences among cultures. The model can be used in the analysis of proverbs in the classroom as well [5, p.98].

To illustrate a way of incorporating proverbs in language classrooms to develop learners' ICC, a corpus of proverbs on a theme in English and Romanian. As for the procedure, the phases proposed by Johns as —*look, familiarize, practice, and create* can be followed. Johns' model is particularly useful because it is originally designed for data-driven learning which fits the aims of intercultural approach. The corpus of the proverbs can be used as the data and students can follow these stages to analyze this data. In the introduction part, the teacher can introduce the topic of the lesson and ask some warm-up questions such as:

- Do you know what proverbs are? /Do you use them in your language? When?
- What are some of the proverbs you know both in English and Romanian/What do you think about their usefulness in everyday communication? /Are they culturally important?

In the *Familiarize phase*, the teacher can get students to match both the English and Romanian proverbs with the definitions given so that students can realize that some of the proverbs in English and Romanian have similar meanings and that some of the proverbs within the same culture share similar definitions. In addition, the learners can be asked to mark the proverbs which have positive meanings about a specific theme and those which have negative meanings. In this way, they can be made to see that even the proverbs in one language can contradict each other. In this phase, the most important step is to get students to compare the proverbs across the two cultures. This can be perfectly done using the model of target and native language proverb comparison proposed by Richmond so that students' ability to analyze cultures through language and hence, to figure out how differently the two cultures can express similar meanings can be enhanced. As for the *Practice phase*, students can be given the chance to discuss in what kind of situations and for what reasons they use proverbs followed by an activity in which they complete situations or dialogues with an English proverb. Finally, in the —*Create phase*, students can be given a proverb and then asked to write a scenario about it to be acted out. In this way, teachers can kill two birds with one stone that is they can both teach the language and increase learners' intercultural awareness and thus, contribute to bringing out intercultural language learners [3, pp. 40-46].

For this reason, ICC is even more important for English teacher trainees who are going to teach the language. As well as linguistic skills, these prospective teachers need to have an increasing understanding of the world and positive attitudes towards speakers of other cultures, be aware of the influence of culture on behaviors and language, of multiple identities and of one's own culture, be tolerant and respectful towards differences in other cultures, and they need discovery and critical skills for personal and social development which can be achieved through the study of proverbs in the classroom for the purpose of developing ICC. In this way, they themselves can transfer these knowledge and skills to their own students and achieve teaching culture through language.

Bibliography

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