T. Hryshchanka

School of Business of BSU, Minsk, Belarus, arutan@mail.ru

COMMUNICATIVE AND PRAGMATIC ASPECTS OF FORMING CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN TEACHING PROFESSIONALLY TARGETED FOREIGN LANGUAGE

A crucial objective in teaching a professionally targeted foreign language is forming students' cross-cultural competence which is the aggregate of linguistic, communicative and cultural components. One also should allow for communicative and pragmatic aspects reflecting the correlation between the language and the environment it functions in. It is this correlation that is examined by pragmatics being the branch of semiotics describing relationships between sign systems and people who utilize them. This research considers communicative and pragmatic aspects of cross-cultural competence that determine the choice of language tools harnessed in our speech to reach a success in communication.

Keywords: *communicative and pragmatic aspects, cross-cultural competence, cross-cultural communication, foreign language, pragmatics, correlation*

Т. В. Грищенко

Институт бизнеса БГУ, Минск, Беларусь, arutan@mail.ru

КОММУНИКАТИВНО-ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ ПРИ ОБУЧЕНИИ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНО-ОРИЕНТИРОВАННОМУ ИНОСТРАННОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

При обучении профессионально-ориентированному иностранному языку одной из важнейших задач является формирование у студентов межкультурной компетенции, представляющей собой совокупность языковой, коммуникативной и культурной составляющих. При этом необходимо учитывать коммуникативно-прагматические аспекты, отражающие взаимосвязь языка и среды его функционирования. Именно эту взаимосвязь изучает прагматика – раздел семиотики, описывающий отношения между знаковыми системами и теми, кто их использует. В данном исследовании рассматриваются коммуникативно-прагматические аспекты межкультурной компетенции, которые определяют выбор языковых средств, употребляемых в речи для реализации успешного общения.

Ключевые слова: *коммуникативно-прагматические аспекты, межкультурная компетенция, межкультурная коммуникация, иностранный язык, прагматика, взаимосвязь*

As intercultural contacts proceed against a background of intensifying globalization process, the dialogue and interaction of cultures are carried out by means of exchange of information amongst communication partners. In the cultural anthropology the relationships of various cultures tend to be called «cross-cultural communication» which signifies «the exchange between two or more cultures and products of their activities implemented in different forms» [1, p. 25].

The efficiency of cross-cultural interaction depends directly on both the ability to harness foreign language facilities for communication purposes and the ability to understand a different culture in comparison with the native one. The above abilities underlie cross-cultural competence.

It should be noted that professional cross-cultural contacts are becoming a routine communication practice. Representatives of various realms of professional activities have got interested in cultural interaction procedures that were denominated «cross-cultural communication» [2, p. 387].

Cross-cultural communication can be defined as «the aggregate of diversified forms of relationships and communication between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures» [6, p. 18]. Cross-cultural competence implies «a mix of knowledge and skills which enable an individual to assess a communicative situation properly, make an efficient use of verbal and non-verbal means, realize communicative intentions, and verify the communication outcomes by using a feedback» [6, p. 278].

Cross-cultural competence is considered as the unity of three components, viz. linguistic, communicative and cultural competences.

The major features of the linguistic competence are a good language command, capacity to express one's idea properly, as well as skills of applying the language and speech tools correctly.

The communicative competence refers to the ability of using verbal and non-verbal facilities inherent in a particular culture and the readiness to adjust one's own communicative demeanor to that cultural environment.

The cultural competence involves the overall information about the country of a target language, its state system, art and society.

Some scholars adhere to a slightly different position. On the one hand, they link the term of «cross-cultural competence» with the concept of «communicative expertise» where «an expertise is an aggregate of competences» [4, p. 69]. But then, they believe that the cross-cultural competence is a component of the communicative expertise that allows succeeding in professional activities.

Modern schools of pragmatic linguistics, as well as methodology, emphasize a paramount role of a human factor, i.e. an individual as an active participant of communication, and a student as an active participant of education process. At the same time, a special importance is attached to an adequate selection and usage of units of language for the purpose of achieving the ultimate aim of communication and having an impact on a partner [3, p. 57]. Thus, correlation between the language and the environment it functions in turns out to be in the spotlight. Strictly speaking, that is the essence of the concept of «pragmatics» which denotes the branch of semiotics researching the relationships between sign systems and people who utilize them.

Such approach resulted in the emergence of a new communicative and pragmatic paradigm based upon the principle of human activities. The paradigm allows for the comprehensive communicative experience of an individual: a creating, playing, sociological, psychological, and, eventually, an acting individual. According to many scholars, it is this paradigm that determines a socially differentiated use of a language. The model of a social differentiation of a language assumes that there are two kinds of social variability of a language: the stratification and situational ones [5, p. 26].

The stratification variability aspect takes account of such factors as belonging to classes, layers, social institutions and professional duties as well as age, sex, education, and ethnical type. The situational variability aspect makes a focus on the role relations of communication participants [7, p. 62].

We tend to think that the communicative and pragmatic competences should be considered as complementary elements of the integrity rather than a part and the whole. This is the foundation for introducing the term of communicative and pragmatic competence which is understood as students' ability to correlate their communicative intentions with the language tools at receptive and reproductive levels in order to have a speech influence.

The pragmatics describes facts of the language through the prism of human activities and studies the language in terms of its functional application, i.e. strives to reveal in what conditions and for what purpose a person speaks. The pragmatic comprehension defines the communicative intention of our speech. Besides, a communicative act presupposes the combination of both non-verbal communication facilities such as gestures, facial expression, body language, emphases, intonation, and extra-verbal ones such as time, space, social structure etc. The situational context is also included in the cross-cultural communication and comprises some culturally conditioned types of behavior. «Small talks»,

negotiation styles and role-playing during business meetings are some examples of the situational context within the framework of studying a foreign language for business use.

Thus, the pragmatic aspect of cross-cultural competence involves the knowledge of language in the context of human activities and is concentrated around its functions in specific environment. The communicative and pragmatic aspects of sociocultural competence are pivotal to make the right selection of linguistic and extra-linguistic means of communication.

These aspects shall be taken into consideration while teaching a professionally targeted foreign language since their sound mix ensures a success in professional activities in the increasingly multicultural society.

At this stage it would be expedient to get down from the general to the specifics and give some examples of pragmatic issues dealt with when teaching the professionally targeted English language in terms of vocabulary use and sociocultural behavior, which appear to be the paramount points in the contemporary business environment.

For instance, many people who have studied English as a foreign language are concerned about the challenges they face in spoken communication with English native-speakers because of vocabulary which frequently proves to be completely different from what was taught at their national secondary schools and/or higher education institutions.

Among some of the reasons underlying these handicaps one could mention colloquial and slang expressions, idioms and neologisms used by English native-speakers. Their using «mull over» instead of «think long» or «knuckle down / buckle down» instead of «begin to work hard» may be a highly embarrassing experience for unskilled communicants. Stumbling upon the authentic socializing style of English or American native-speakers, overseas HEIs' alumni may claim that they were taught some wrong or even «dead» language. Consequently, a teacher should make a focus on phrasal verbs to fill in these probable communication gaps but, simultaneously, should not overlook giving students a clear idea of formal and informal environment, written and spoken speech, accordingly, where non-phrasal and phrasal verbs are applicable.

One more point to be mentioned involves the emergence of a multitude of new lexical units in the language of business, most often through the acquisition of new meanings by existing words and word partnerships. For example, «to reboot» is about reloading computers or changing attitudes rather than boots. «Shovel-ready projects» have nothing to do with shovels and mean projects ready for immediate launching, with no rescheduling or redesigning. «Downsizing» is associated with redundancies, and «meltdown» with an economic or financial crisis. Thus, teachers of English for business communication are supposed to constantly track such innovations to share them with their students.

Another essential issue to be noted within the framework of communicative pragmatics is the political correctness inherent in the Anglophone civilization and increasingly spreading worldwide. The gist of the concept of political correctness is the use of lexico-semantic euphemisms destined to exclude any verbal displays of discrimination. First and foremost it refers to the demand to utilize a gender neutral language: «homemaker» rather than «housewife», «chairperson» rather than «chairman», «business manager» or «executive» rather than «businessman», «owner» or «proprietor» instead of «landlord», etc. To say «John helps Mary with the housework» would sound politically incorrect as it would allude by default to the woman's duty to do the housework. So, a correct option is to say «They share the housework».

One more facet of the coin is the imperative of avoiding mentioning human's physical or mental defects in a straightforward way as well as utilizing other lexical units that can be perceived as a sign of discrimination in whatever fields. The historical norm is changing by giving birth to «disabled person» instead of «invalid» or «cripple», «speech-impaired» in place of «stutterer» or «stammerer», «alternate life style» as a substitute to «sodomy», «low-income areas» as an alternative to «slums», etc.

A large number of euphemisms that have appeared quite recently are compound words with the «challenged» component: «horizontally challenged» for «fat», «vertically challenged» for «short», «follicularly challenged» for «bald», «financially challenged» for «poor», etc.

Implementation of the principles of tolerance and equal rights via political correctness appears to be a great asset at first sight. Nevertheless, this culturological phenomenon encounters a strong opposition from a part of the Western society, not to mention their partners worldwide who range it from ridiculous to notorious, or even absurd. A teacher of business English had better take a neutral stance in this argument and make a focus on the undeniable necessity to take into account the political correctness norms adopted by most occidental public institutions and comply with them, at least not to hurt our counterparts' feelings unintentionally. Besides, a teacher might implicate that if we like to do business with our occidental partners and use their technological achievements and innovations, it would be consistent for us to esteem their humanitarian values as well.

Non-verbal and extra-verbal communication devices, even though they are not a subject of linguistics, accompany or even substitute for the verbal means of communication and are highly important in terms of pragmatics. A body language is what distinguishes human-beings from machines and is used by all nations, yet various cultures have their own non-verbal signal systems. For instance, nodding a head up and down is a sign of assent in Western cultures, while to say «no» we swing a head from left to right. However, in Bulgaria the meanings of these gestures are the opposite. Indians tilt their heads from side to side to say «yes», which can be understood as «no» by Europeans. A thumb up is a sign of friendliness and encouragement in most countries but not in Iran and Iraq where it is the equivalent of showing somebody a middle finger. An eye contact in Japan can signal aggression and disrespect, while avoiding such contact is a sign of evasiveness or insincerity in the occidental culture. An example of extra-verbal communication tied up with national customs and traditions may be the Chinese negative attitude to giving flowers since in their culture flowers are a symbol of mourning. The issue in question is endless but the conclusion is only one. Students should be made aware about the need to learn the cross-cultural variety to avoid embarrassing situations and reach a success in their oncoming professional activities.

As far as the written speech is concerned, its pragmatic significance can hardly be exaggerated. What matters here is the diversity of functional styles ranging from very formal officialese, through official business, neutral, unofficial to familiar one. The choice of an appropriate style depends on the purpose of writing and presupposes the variety of lexical and grammar tools to be used when drawing up a particular text: a business or informal letter, a contract, a memo, an essay or an information article to be published in media, etc. So, an essay would contain plenty of the author's possibly ambiguous viewpoints, puns, allusions, and so forth to convey the information in an amusing way. Unlike that, the purpose of drawing up a contract is to describe the contractual parties' obligations as precisely as possible, which entails very formal wordings and special syntax, like «shall infinitive» for the contractors' duties or inverted constructions like «should either party fail to fulfill their contractual obligations», just to mention a few peculiarities.

As a conclusion it should be noted that the issue of communicative and pragmatic aspects of forming cross-cultural competence in teaching a professionally targeted foreign language is multilateral and admits diverse academic approaches. However, beyond all doubt, we ought to regard this matter earnestly if we are aimed at building a sustainable, pacific, and prosperous cross-cultural economy.

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