Improving the Intercultural Communicative Competence of English Language Students

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Abstract

Nowadays intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is an important tool in foreign language teaching and learning. The main goal of this article is to propose some tasks to improve the intercultural communicative competence in the English Language Course at Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas, Santa Clara, Villa Clara, Cuba. In so doing, the article provides some theoretical foundations of concepts related to culture, communicative competence, intercultural communication and intercultural communicative competence. The tasks proposed can be adapted to different contexts, taking into account learners' needs and interests. They apply the four language skills at the same time, combining communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence, the two aspects that make a learner a perfect mediator within the teaching and learning process of a foreign language.

Keywords: *Culture, intercultural communication, foreign language teaching, intercultural communicative competence*

Introduction

More people than ever before are involved in interactions with foreigners, communities are becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural day by day and demands for intercultural communication skills are increasing as more and more businesses go global or international. People realize that without the help of intercultural communication there are barriers and limitations when they enter a foreign territory and this may cause confusion and misunderstandings. When stepping into foreign grounds it is vital to fully understand the cultural differences that exist so as to prevent damaging relationships resulting from intercultural communication gaps. We must always be aware that the norms, beliefs, practices and language of any group are not static but dynamic; in other words, a group is constantly negotiating and renegotiating its norms and values among its membership.

Regardless of different points of view, culture has taken an important place in foreign language teaching and learning. It has been widely recognized that language is used as a main medium through which culture is expressed. However, "pure information" is useful but does not necessarily lead to learners' insight; whereas the development of people's cultural awareness leads to a more critical thinking. To understand what is intercultural communication in foreign language learning and teaching, it is necessary to take into account first of all the pure concept of culture. It also requires the acquisition of information about the meaning of language as the principal factor in intercultural communication in foreign language learning and teaching.

Most frequently it is found that students to a great extent are taught the rules of language, but are not always able to communicate adequately since they are not knowledgeable enough about the target culture. Taking into consideration this matter, it is extremely fundamental that students should have some background about the culture of the language studied from the very beginning.

Statement of the problem

Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas (UCLV) is an international university which welcomes each year approximately 40 foreign undergraduate students as scholarship students, Master Degree and PhD students, and also professionals from different educational institutions around the world who come for fruitful interchange. Therefore, this is what makes it an outstanding intercultural society where inevitable processes like cultural clashes and interactions occur frequently.

After analyzing the curriculum of the English Language Course at this University and after observing teachers' and students' behavior in class, we came to the conclusion that despite the great progress achieved, the teaching of both *macroskills* (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and *microskills* (vocabulary and grammar) is usually given more emphasis than the development of intercultural communicative competence.

Therefore, we considered it necessary to design a set of tasks to improve the students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in order to prepare students for a better interaction or communication with people from other cultural backgrounds, taking into account that achieving an effective communication through language teaching is more than a matter of language proficiency and enhancing communicative competence, but also enhancing intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which offers a way of enriching the language learning experience and contributing to the wider educational goals of better understanding one's own community as well as those of others.

Literature Review

Culture

The concept of culture has been very complex throughout centuries, since it manifests itself both in patterns of language, thoughts and in forms of activity and behavior which is not constant but variable within different ethnic groups, geographical environments and the existence of different views of reality.

In 1976, Hall developed the iceberg analogy of culture. If the culture of a society was the iceberg, Hall reasoned, that there are some aspects visible, above the water, but there is a larger portion hidden beneath the surface. This means that the external or conscious part of culture is what we can see

and is the tip of the iceberg; it includes behaviors and some beliefs. The internal or subconscious part of culture is below the surface of a society and includes some beliefs, values and thoughts and patterns that underlie behavior. This model teaches us that we cannot judge a new culture based only on what we see when we first enter it. We must take the time to get to know individuals from that culture and interact with them. Only by doing so can we uncover the values and beliefs that underlie the behavior of that society.

For Loveday (1981), culture involves the implicit norms and conventions of a society and its methods of doing things. In this author's opinion, the notion of culture is not necessarily related to nationalities, but to communities characterized by a range of factors such as age, gender, class, ethnicity and even such things as leisure pursuits.

Among the authors who provided their definitions in the 1990s are Kramsch (1998) and Hinkel (1999).The formerdescribes culture as "membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings" (Kramsch**,** 1998**:** 10), while the latter (Hinkel 1999) states that culturerefers to areas of inquiry into human societies, groups, systems, behaviors, and activities.

In the following decade, other authors became interested in the topic of culture. For example, Brown (2000: 177) defines culture as "the ideas, customs, skills, arts and tools that characterize a given group of people in a given period of time"; Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler (2003**:** 45) define culture as a complex system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviors, practices, rituals and lifestyles of the people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artifacts they produce and the institutions they create.

Tomalin (2008) considers culture as the fifth language skill, in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing; he assumes we could argue that the teaching of culture should include cultural knowledge (knowledge of the culture's institutions), cultural values (*psyche* of the country), cultural behavior (knowledge of routines and behavior), and cultural skills (development of intercultural sensitivity and awareness).

After analyzing all the previous ideas concerning culture, it is possible to describe it as a shared set of basic assumptions and values, with resultant behavioral norms, attitudes and beliefs which manifest themselves in systems and institutions as well as behavioral patterns and non-behavioral items. There are various levels to culture, ranging from the easily observable outer layers (such as behavioral conventions) to the increasingly more difficult to grasp inner layers (such as assumptions and values). Culture is shared among members of one group or society, and has an interpretative function for the members of that group. Culture is situated between the human nature on the one hand and the individual personality on the other. In other words, it means that culture is not inheritable or genetic, but learned. Although all members of a society share their culture, expressions of culture-resultant behavior are modified by the individuals' personality.

Communicative competence

The idea of Communicative Competence is originally derived from Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance. By competence, Chomsky (1965) means, the shared knowledge of ideal speaker-listener set in a completely homogeneous speech community. On the other hand, performance is concerned with the process of applying the fundamental knowledge to the actual language use. In other words, competence and performance conflict, from Chomsky's point of view reduce to the obvious fact that people, when speaking in the real world, often make linguistic errors and these errors in linguistic performance were irrelevant to the study of linguistic competence (the knowledge that allows people to construct and understand grammatical sentences).

Hymes (1972) finds Chomsky's distinction of competence and performance too narrow to describe language behavior as a whole. He points out the necessity to distinguish two kinds of competence: (a) linguistic competence that deals with producing and understanding grammatically correct sentences and (b) communicative competence that deals with producing and understanding sentences that are appropriate and acceptable to a particular situation, thus bringing the sociolinguistic perspective into Chomsky's linguistic view of competence

During the 1970s and 1980s many linguists interested in the theory of language acquisition and/or the theory of language testing contributed to the further development of the concept of communicative competence. For example, Widdowson (1983) made a distinction between competence and capacity. In his view, competence, i.e. communicative competence, has to do with the knowledge of linguistic and sociolinguistic conventions, whereas capacity is related with the ability to use knowledge as means of creating meaning in a language. According to him, ability is not a component of competence.

Canale and Swain (1980, 1981) understood communicative competence as a synthesis of an underlying system of knowledge and skill needed for communication. At first, they proposed three main components: grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Later, Canale (1983, 1984) transferred some elements from sociolinguistic competence into the fourth component which he named discourse competence.

Savignon (1972,1983) stressed the aspect of ability in her concept of communicative competence. She described communicative competence as "the ability to function in a truly communicative setting – that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors"(Savignon,1972:8). According to her, the nature of communicative competence is not static but dynamic; it is more interpersonal than intrapersonal and relative rather than absolute. For this author, competence is an underlying ability and performance an open manifestation of competence. In her opinion, competence can be observed, developed, maintained and evaluated only through performance.

Following Canale and Swain's theory (1980), Bachman (1990) suggested using the term "communicative language ability", claiming that this term combines in itself the meanings of both language proficiency and communicative competence. He defined communicative language ability as a concept including knowledge or competence and capacity for appropriate use of knowledge in a contextual communicative language use. He devoted special attention to the way how language is used for the purpose of achieving a particular communicative goal in a specific situational context of communication.

For Bachman and Palmer (1996), many features of language users such as their topical knowledge, affective schemata, and language ability influence the communicative language ability. According to them, the fundamental characteristic is the users' language ability comprising two broad areas: language knowledge and strategic competence.

Celce-Murcia et. al. (1995) further divided communicative competence into linguistic, sociocultural, strategic, discourse, and actional competencies. They affirm that linguistic, sociocultural and actional competencies shape discourse competence, which in turn, also shapes each of the three components. Through this model they provide us with a clear picture of the interrelationship among all these components, but reinforcing the function to the strategic competence.

The framework model of communicative competence presented by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2006) includes five components: discourse competence, linguistic competence, pragmatic competence, intercultural competence and strategic competence. The main aim of their framework is

to show how the four language skills serve to build discourse competence for communicative purposes, while highlighting the importance of the intercultural component which is represented as a circle enclosing all five components.

As it can be noted, the notion of communicative competence has been changed and adapted to the context of its use. This process has been accompanied by a change in the originally used term. Therefore, not only the term "communicative competence" has been used but also other terms such as language proficiency, communicative proficiency, communicative language ability, communicative language competence, among others. Nevertheless, all of them are very close in meaning to the definition of communicative competence since they were defined as knowledge and abilities/skills for use. This shows that there has been an agreement in relation to the fact that a competent language user should possess not only knowledge about language but also the ability and skill to activate that knowledge in a communicative event.

Intercultural communication

Many authors agree that in order to communicate effectively with another culture there must be a level of empathy or identification with the principles of that culture. Thus, whenever people of one culture want to deal in some way with others outside that culture, the need for understanding issues of intercultural communication exist, and techniques for facilitating communication begin to emerge. In most literature, Edward Hall is considered the founder of intercultural communication (Hart, 1996). However, the notion of intercultural communication began to gain importance in the 1970's with specialized intercultural communication courses, societies and journals.

Intercultural communication can be defined in terms of identity and contact. Rodrigo Alsina (1999: 19) has clearly stated that intercultural communication has existed as long as two people, who perceived themselves as belonging to different cultures, have tried to communicate. This means that interculturality is a phenomenon that occurs naturally and it takes place both interpersonally and mediated by a technological intervention (Rodrigo Alsina, 1999: 27-32).

Rodrigo Alsina (1999) highlights three of the theories concerned with interpersonal intercultural communication: the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory developed mainly by William B. Gudykunst (1993, 1995), the Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory introduced by Young Yun Kim (1991, 1995), and the Third-Culture Building Theory developed by Fred L. Casmir (1993).

The Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) Theory by William B. Gudykunst (1993, 1995) has as its starting point the psychological effect of interpersonal intercultural communication in comparison with simple interpersonal communication. Its objective is to achieve effective communication overcoming anxiety and uncertainty. The Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory developed by Young Yun Kim (1991, 1995) seeks to find out what are the key factors for adapting to a new culture. The Third-Culture Building Theory developed by Fred L. Casmir (1993) advocates that, given the failure of the national culture to overcome the barriers of intercultural communication and recognizing diversity as the backbone of society, it is necessary to build "third cultures" that allow effective intercultural communication. From these theories of intercultural communication it can be assumed that:

1. Diversity is a major feature of life in society.
2. Communication is the tool for the construction of society through the negotiation of meanings.
3. There is opportunity for communicative success although communication also supposes misunderstandings since it is based on inference, the assignment of communicative intentions and interpretation. Without these cognitive processes, which can cause anxiety and uncertainty, there is no communication.
4. Communication is not a neutral process, but it is charged by social relationships, which are power relations.

Therefore, intercultural communication, as we conceive it, can be defined as interpersonal communication where people with different cultural references intervene to perceive themselves, having to overcome some personal and/or contextual barriers in order to communicate effectively.

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Although it is in wide use today, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is a recent notion and there is no clear consensus about what it is. Sometimes this term is referred to as global competence, international competence, multicultural competence, and so forth. Some researchers stress global knowledge, others emphasize sensitivity, and still others point to certain skills. The characterization of intercultural communicative competence presented below, suggests that it is a really complex phenomenon that takes into account several different components.

Fantini (2006) defines intercultural communicative competence as the complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself. For Wiseman (2001) it is the comprised form of knowledge, skills, and motivation necessary to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultures where motivation is an important element.

The most influential model of intercultural communicative competence is supplied by Byram (1997) and most definitions of this competence nowadays are based on this model. His model, in turn, is based on Hymes' model (1972) and van Ek's model (1986) of communicative competence. He starts off with a comprehensive analysis of the factors that influence intercultural communication; i.e., attitudes, knowledge and skills.

Byram (1997) defines intercultural communicative competence as the relationship of linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and intercultural competence. This shows that he is not ready to completely abandon objectives and guidelines from the communicative approach of foreign language teaching but rather expands it and adds an intercultural perspective. This way, Byram also makes sure that the connection of language and culture is acknowledged.

In Byram's view (2002), intercultural communicative competence is a complex combination of some dimensions. He presents them as the five so-called *savoirs*:

- *"savoir être,"* which is concerned with attitudes and values and consists in showing curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own;
- *"savoirs,"* which refers to the knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction;
- *"savoir comprendre,"* related to the skills of interpreting and relating, that is to say, the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own;
- *"savoir apprendre/faire,"* connected to the skills of discovery and interaction or the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction;

- *"savoir s'engager,"* in relation to critical cultural awareness and/or political education, which means having the ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries

Byram's model provides a framework of what intercultural competence is and what kind of skills are to be taken into account when teaching language according to the intercultural approach. In addition, the model is specifically designed for the language classroom, therefore considering the language learner and the desired outcomes of an intercultural approach to language teaching. The model highlights the necessary skills of intercultural speakers though it does not limit itself to the native speaker's competence. Moreover, the model does not neglect the importance of language and makes sure to point out that linguistic competence is part of achieving intercultural competence.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study was to propose a set of tasks to help develop the intercultural communicative competence of students of the English Language Course at UCLV.

The specific objectives were:

- To set the theoretical foundations for tasks to help develop the intercultural communicative competence of students of the English Language Course at UCLV
- To assess the existing situation of the intercultural communicative competence of students of the English Language Course at UCLV
- To design a set of tasks in order to help develop the intercultural communicative competence of students of the English Language Course at UCLV
- To assess the proposed tasks by specialists

Importance of the study

The study may contribute to the raise of awareness of both students and professors of Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" of Las Villas (UCLV) about the importance of the improvement of intercultural communicative competence and its impact on the English Language Course, the School of Humanities and on the university as a whole. Every year this university welcomes students from different parts of the world and has signed cooperation agreements with other universities of the world.

Methodology

The methodology used corresponds to a qualitative paradigm since it is based on the experiences, perceptions, opinions and suggestions of both students and professors of the English Language Course at UCLV in relation to intercultural communicative competence (ICC).

The study consisted of three main stages: (1) the selection of the participants, (2) the process of data collection, and (3) the data analysis

Selection of the participants

The selection of the participants included 10 professors from the Department of English Studies, School of Humanities of UCLV and 25 students of the English Language Course from the same department.

Selection of professors

For choosing the professors, their academic and scientific degrees were taking into account. Some professors hold scientific degrees of either PhD or MSc and they were Full Professors, Associate Professors or Assistant Professors. Some of them were pursuing their PhD degrees. All professors included in the study gave their consent to collaborate.

Selection of students

The students' academic level was a key issue to consider. Therefore, 5 students of first, second, third, fourth and fifth academic years of the English Language Course were chosen, because the authors observed that there is a need to introduce and make more emphasis on the intercultural communicative competence in the English Language Course, which embraces all the academic years. All students (25) agreed to participate in the study.

Data Collection

The data collected in this study included (1) the analysis of the Curriculum of the English Language Course to ascertain how the intercultural communicative competence is expected to achieve, (2) professors' interview to verify the need to improve the intercultural communicative competence in the English Language Course and to know their opinions and ideas about its development, (3) students' questionnaire to determine how knowledgeable they were about the intercultural communicative competence and their points of view about how this competence is achieved during their training and the necessity to improve it, and (4) professors' questionnaire to critically assesses the validity and applicability of the tasks proposed by the authors of the research.

Data analysis

After analyzing the Curriculum of the English Language Course, it was found that it is well defined in its objectives of bringing students to become professionals of English. However, it projects cultural aspects in the course of studies in many subjects in a superficial way and in a closed circle. Also, more emphasis is made on Communicative Competence (CC) than on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).

The professors' interview and students' questionnaire revealed their recognition about the fact that Intercultural Communicative Competence is a crucial aspect of language teaching and learning since the role of a language learner is to be a mediator in the communicative process and cultural background is one of the channels that leads one to be a good communicator. They suggested that there is a necessity to include or bring more often to the classroom activities including cultural backgrounds of a variety of English-speaking countries. In addition, they expressed that it is necessary to design more teaching resources in order to improve the intercultural communicative competence of both students and professors.

Once a set of tasks in order to help develop the intercultural communicative competence of students of the English Language Course at UCLV was designed, the ten professors previously interviewed were given a questionnaire for them to critically assess the validity and applicability of the tasks proposed. They considered that the tasks fulfill the principles of Intercultural Communicative Competence and that they meet the objectives of the English Language Course. Moreover, they stated that the tasks are very varied and imply different cultural contexts with the aim of raising intercultural awareness, from simple observation of other people's behavior to role plays and interviews, among other activities. They believed the set of tasks suggests all kinds of resources that would help professors to improve the teaching and learning process of Intercultural Communicative Competence in the English Language Course.

All these results obtained from the analysis of the Curriculum of the English Language Course, the professors' interview and the students' questionnaire were considered to propose a set of tasks that will be presented in the following section.

Tasks to improve the Intercultural Communicative Competence of English Language Students

These tasks are intended to aim students a theoretical insight into the key concepts of intercultural communicative competence as well as into a practice-oriented typology of culture-related activities and real life situations that could be incorporated into regular lesson designs.

All the tasks fulfill the following requirements:

- They were chosen on the basis of educative and linguistic criteria.
- They are centered on students' Intercultural Communication needs, interests, and experiences.
- They are intended to teach English as an International Language, which includes the concepts of interculturality and developing Intercultural Awareness.
- They are meaningful and engage students in being aware of their own and foreign cultures.
- They guide learners to pay attention to the significance of the ways people from different cultural backgrounds choose to communicate.
- They foster a feeling of selves' confidence on the students, when they are facing new cultures and\or foreign people.
- They equip them to be independent, practical ethnographers and more efficient language learners.
- They foster their skills of observation, interpretation and critical cultural awareness.
- Their level of difficulty should be monitored and applied by teachers, according to student levels and subjects of the course.
- They help them to manage the cultural mediation and not cultural assimilation.
- They make students develop strategies to manage cross-cultural clashes and misunderstandings.

The tasks presented in this article are brainstorm, guessing game, ranking exercise, interview, story, observation, role play, case study and jigsaws. All of them can be classified as communicative, but more than that they are proposed as practical classroom activities dealing with issues of interculturality but in a flexible way which could be adapted to suit to different contexts.

Moreover, they allow the learners to engage themselves in the exploration of particular cultural frames of reference; they provide learners with tools to become mediators between different cultural realities so as to promote intercultural communicative competence within the most diverse cultural scenarios.

The tasks are flexible and suitable to different contexts, taking into account learners' needs and interests. In addition, they could integrate songs, proverbs, discourses, body language, sports, gender, movies, and anecdotes; everything that projects a different and new scenario of interculturality around the world. Therefore, apart from preparing learners interculturally, they apply the four language skills at the same time, combining communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence, the two aspects that make a learner a perfect mediator within the teaching and learning process of a foreign language.

Each task is structured as follows:

1. Type of activity
2. Topic
3. Aims
4. Level
5. Content (Communicative functions)
6. Teaching Aids
7. Procedure (Organization)
8. Evaluation

Task # 1

1. Type of activity: Brainstorm
2. Topic: Culture and its components
3. Aims: a) To explore the concept of culture b)To develop ideas about its main components
4. Level: Beginner
5. Content (Communicative Functions): Giving opinion\Making comparison
6. Teaching Aids: Textbooks, Blackboard, and Articles concerning the topic
7. Procedures (Organization):
   - Students should do a mind map of Culture; they should be able to draw culture as central topic and its components as branching topics.

- After drawing the mind mad on the board and finding suitable words to fit in the blank spaces, teacher asks the students to link together different ideas and thoughts around the central theme.
- Teacher encourages students to introduce the concept of culture, taking to account the ideas and thoughts by asking questions like: What is culture for you? What does it involve? And what shapes culture?
- Teacher asks the students to read the introduction to the activity, and asks the students to look at the example of culture definition and discuss results; students should also check any of unknown vocabulary.

  Example:

  1. "Culture is the object of study of a range of different research disciplines: anthropology, ethnography, cultural studies." Corbett (2003).
  2. "Culture is an entire way of life; it involves the implicit norms and conventions of a society, its methods of "going about doing things", it is historically transmitted but also adaptive and creative ethos, its symbols and its organization of experience." Loveday (1981).
  3. "Culture is sometimes compared to an iceberg, some of which is visible, but much of it is difficult to see, or invisible." Edward Hall (1976)

- Teacher asks the students to look at the mind map and point out in which aspects, e.g. "Social life", "gender" (the differing social and work roles of male and female) are viewed in their own cultures.
- Teacher indicates students to work in pairs or small groups; some may wish to restructure and add new elements to the mind map as well as extend it. Discussion of emotive or abstract topics such as driving habits ("traffic"), fashion ("dress"), bluntness ("directness of speech").Finding the "perfect" definition will be difficult if not impossible.
- Teacher should use the definitions to help students become more aware of how cultures develop and how they manifest themselves. Teacher should encourage students to take into account culture complexity and flexibility as concept and at the same time students should be encouraged to be open and tolerant.

8. Evaluation: Teacher asks the students to define the word *"culture"* by giving them a statement on which to base their answer:

   Examples: Culture can mean different things to different people.

   Think about:

   - How culture is created – by geography, climate, history, coincidence?
   - What groups of people can be said to have a culture – races, countries, companies?
   - In what ways you see, hear or experience it – by behavior, attitudes, and gestures?

Task # 2

1. Type of activity: Guessing Game
2. Topic: The culture iceberg
3. Aims:
   - To explore how features of given cultures range from the easily recognizable to the almost imperceptible
   - To develop an awareness of this range

4. Level: Beginner
5. Content (Communicative functions): Describing Cultures\Placing cultural features
6. Teaching Aids: Blackboard, Brochures, Magazines, Articles
7. Procedure (Organization):

   First the teacher provides students with an overview of what is a culture iceberg, and then invites two foreign students to talk, answer questions and provide information that English Language students request to fill their guessing paper, where the cultural iceberg is represented.

   - Step one: The class is divided into groups, and they are given a guessing paper with a culture iceberg in it, in order to explore and place in the iceberg (what is above and what is below the water level) the given culture features obtained through questions they are supposed to ask the foreign students invited.

     Example:

     - Is the music one of the most visible aspects of the foreign students' culture?
     - What do you think people from other cultures know about their countries?

   - Step two: The foreign student gives a lot information, acts, goes back and forth providing in this way features from his\her culture (driving habits, greetings, emotion shown in public, physical gestures, family life treatment of outsiders/foreigners, values and beliefs, etc., and students have to figure out which one goes above or below the water level and they try to guess the reasons that the given cultures aspects are placed there). With the help of the visitor, teacher should analyze which group has done the better work.
   - Step three: Afterwards, each group should list components providing which are important in the target culture and discuss the results. Also students could suggest some other aspects (stereotype, sayings, dialects, etc.) that they had known about the target culture presented, before the meeting.

8. Evaluation: As a follow-up activity, teacher asks the students to think and write about the differences between profiling their own culture as opposed to profiling cultures to which they do not belong, by comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations.

Task # 3

1. Type of activity: Representation
2. Topic: Celebration around the world
3. Aims:
   - To learn about different ways of celebrating the same festivity around the world (New Year)
   - To understand how they celebrate it in other cultures.

4. Level: Beginner\Intermediate
5. Content (Communicative Functions): Expressing wishes\congratulating someone
6. Teaching Aids: Magazine, Articles, Websites, Pictures
7. Procedure (Organization):
   - Step I: Teacher divides class into groups; each one has to choose a country where New Year is celebrated and do a work about it. The task will be a contest for the groups, so each work has to answer questions in order to fulfill as much as possible the information about each celebration, for example: Where and when does it happen? What do they celebrate? What do people wear? What do children do?
   - Step II: The presentation has to be accompanied by power point, flags, posters, pictures, magazines in order to give the real image as close as possible of the reality. The students have to look for extra class materials, with the foreign student communities and so on.
   - Step III: The day of presentation students have to give a moment of festivity, some could dress up, and others could bring music and dances according to the culture represented. The department should open the invitation for the other academic groups in order to enjoy the activity together. Also students could include some terms in other languages and give the translation according to the country represented. The best group wins and the pictures should be uploaded on the faculty website, for the next year inspiration.

8. Evaluation: None, just considerations that teacher should make in the next class.

Task # 4

1. Type of activity: Interview
2. Topic: One person's experience
3. Aims:
   - To analyze someone's real life situation of an intercultural encounter
   - To point out aspects and difficulties taken into account

4. Level: Intermediate
5. Content (Communicative functions): Asking question/Being appropriate
6. Teaching Aids: Recorder
7. Procedure (Organization):

Teacher asks the students to elaborate on their own a list of ten questions for the interview and then gives them the opportunity to work out of the classroom and then bring the results to class.

   - Step I: Students, working in pairs should choose willingly professors from the university (UCLV) who have had experience in a foreign country to be interviewed. The questions have to be clear and concise, and well related with intercultural communication

     Examples:

     - What was the first impression of the target culture?
     - Which cultural aspects were the most difficult to face?
     - What aspects did you take into consideration to avoid misunderstanding?
     - In which way language helped/did not help in the interrelationship?

   - Step II: In the classroom teacher asks the pairs to exchange questions among them, in order to analyze what kinds of questions were asked in the interviews and why they were chosen.
   - Step III: The results of the interview should also be analyzed, in a sense that it helps students improve their intercultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity. It might be quite interesting to find out that each experience brings news aspects of certain culture that maybe one never knew before.

8. Evaluation: Teacher poses questions to see the students' proficiency and attainment of the interview activities results.

   Example:

   - What qualities you need to deal successfully with other cultures, and how to operate successfully with people from other cultures?
   - Do you think there is a relationship between language and culture understanding?
   - How does learning the language of the target culture help in the intercultural communication?

Task # 5

1. Type of activity: Observation/Role play
2. Topic: Greeting Manners
3. Aims:

- To explore global ways of greetings
- To be aware about Global greeting styles

4. Level: Intermediate
5. Content (Communicative functions): Greeting someone\Being formal\informal
6. Teaching Aids: Paper posters
7. Procedure (Organization):
   - Step I: Teacher divides the class into groups of four, and then asks students to prepare for the introduction of the concepts related to greeting manners when meeting somebody for the first time. Students should start a discussion on rude and polite manners in their own country\culture.
   - Step II: The teacher gives to each group a piece of paper where greeting manners of different countries\culture are explained.

   Example:

      - Italy- …Italians greet friends with two light kisses on the cheek, first the right and then the left…
      - Japan-…Bowing, a gesture of respect, is probably the feature of Japanese etiquette that is best known outside Japan…
      - Canada- …In Canada when introduced to another person for the first time, it is common to be offered a firm handshake; Greetings go along with a smile and eye contact…

   - Step III: The groups have to read analyze and prepare to act for the class according to the type of greeting descriptions. Each group acts out the different ways expressed in the paragraphs, and teacher encourages the rest of the class to guess where that greeting is from. They can ask some basic yes\ no questions in order to reach the correct conclusion.
   - Step IV: After guessing the country\culture represented in the greeting acts, teacher asks the students to set up a discussion on the different greeting styles and explain how they would react in an international context if they do not know how to greet in that context.

8. Evaluation: Teacher asks the students to do as homework a report about the acts played, the greeting manners in general and the comparison among those presented in class taking into account greeting manners of the students' own home country\culture. The work should be handed in next class.

Task # 6

1. Type of activity: Story

2. Topic: Cultural briefing of an English Speaking Country (Ex: South Africa)
3. Aims:
   - To examine the usefulness of cultural briefing for any intended intercultural meeting
   - To identify the most important elements in cultural briefing

4. Level: Intermediate\Advanced
5. Content (Communicative functions): Telling story\ Identifying social standards
6. Teaching Aids: Blackboard, Pictures, Magazines, Documentaries, websites, etc.
7. Procedure (Organization):

   Teacher should make sure students are acquainted with the term "cultural briefing", and the students should know from previous class which countries they are supposed to bring as a topic. They should work in groups in order to check their understanding about cultural briefing.

   - Step I: Teacher asks the students to point out when it might be necessary a cultural briefing, for example: first business trip to a country, an international forum etc. and also he/she asks for some elements which students think would be included in, for example, greetings and non-verbal communication, organization of the public transport system, and forms of address and teacher asks them to discuss these points briefly in pairs and compare results.
   - Step II: Teacher asks the groups to prepare to present the target culture\country, with different cultural aspects:

   Example:

      - Respect for authority (law)
      - Must and Must not when you meet elders (respect)
      - How to welcome and treat a guest (habits and customs)

   - Step III: The groups should compare the results and present the remarkable differences among target cultures.

8. Evaluation: Teacher asks the students, as individual homework, to choose certain specific points in a determined target culture and write an essay to be handed in next class. (For example: in culture X, visitors should be aware that pre-planning for meetings is very important.)

Conclusion

Life in this century has provided people with diversity and possibility in communication with the corresponding increase in intercultural communication. Therefore, foreign language teaching and learning in universities should not only be instrumental, but it should set a new goal to train students with intercultural communicative competence to meet the needs of our globalized world. Intercultural communicative competence should be integrated into quality education of universities as an important part. Assessing intercultural communicative competence

allows learners to familiarize with the features of other countries and to increase their awareness of the cultural diversity of the country, while at the same time it improves the awareness of their own culture.

The improvement of intercultural communicative competence helps learners in the awareness of their selves and others based on an understanding of how members of a community live in their own world. In other words, language learners must become systematic, critical observers and describers of cultural behaviors, attitudes and beliefs that motivate these behaviors. They must explore and understand their own culture and be prepared to explain it to those whose experience of life and formations of belief are often very different from their own as well as understand the other cultures where they become cultural mediators.

The tasks presented in this article are designed in a flexible way, suitable for different contexts and regarding students' needs and interests in order to enhance students' intercultural communicative competence. They can be regarded as a useful gate to the attainment of such mentioned goals, which bring learning, motivation, enjoyment and growing professional perspectives altogether.

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