Chapter 12
Intercultural Pragmatics as Part of Intercultural Education for Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural education, as an idea to understanding and respect other cultures, has been suggested as an important element of educational endeavor across the curriculum for primary and secondary schools in many countries worldwide, including Poland. If such key elements of intercultural education, as knowledge of other cultures, skills of negotiating meaning, or the attitude of tolerance and openness are to become the new goals in language education, it is incumbent on teachers and, first and foremost, on teacher trainers to be interculturally aware themselves before they can introduce the dimension into their foreign language classes. Thinking specifically about teaching intercultural pragmatics, that is acting with words in an intercultural context, neither the core curriculum nor the coursebooks provide sufficient encouragement and guidance for foreign language teachers.

INTERCULTURAL PRAGMATICS AS PART OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION FOR ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINEES

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other cultures, skills of negotiating meaning or the attitude of tolerance and openness are to become new goals in language education, it is incumbent on teachers and, first and foremost, on teacher trainers to be interculturally aware themselves before they can introduce the dimension into their foreign language classes. Thinking specifically about teaching intercultural pragmatics, that is acting with words in an intercultural context, neither the Core Curriculum nor the coursebooks provide sufficient encouragement and guidance for foreign language teachers (Iluk, 2013). This paper is an action research account of an attempt at increasing future teachers’ of English intercultural communication skills and teaching skills through group project work devoted to intercultural pragmatics issues.

TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS MEDIATORS OF CULTURE

The long tradition of teaching English as a foreign language in Poland has dictated a narrow, Anglophone perspective on student communicative competence. The term was first defined by Hymes (1966), leading to later research in relation to its sociolinguistic component (Canale & Swain, 1980). Byram (1997) observed that the language had been taught as if targeted at the community of native speakers, which ignores the students’ cultural background. Polish teachers of English, however, recognise the importance of “the cultural component” mainly in terms of the “target language culture” (Mucha, 2015), that is “the culture of a selected language area”, which in the case of English will most often be Great Britain or the USA (Derenowski:www.szkolnictwo.pl). It seems apposite to ask the following question: for the speakers and users of English as an international language, what is the “culture of selected language area”? What about the students’ own culture? It seems important to pursue the shift in perspectives, suggested by Byram (1997), who redefined the role of the language teacher, from somebody who knows about the target language culture to somebody who knows how to mediate between cultures through an understanding of one’s own and others’ ways of communicating, thinking and feeling. Thus, believing that for the understanding of one’s own and other cultures students need a number of skills (Byram, 1997), such as the skills of discovery, the skills of understanding and behaving appropriately (Byram’s savoirs), then these same skills should first become part of teacher education.

In my Sociolinguistics and Intercultural Communication courses taught at the Department of English at the Pedagogical University in Cracow, Poland, I have tried to let our trainees, in-service and pre-service teachers of English, explore the possibilities of teaching English as an international and intercultural language. Because teachers seldom realize the importance of the above mentioned issues, nor
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