THE 7TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

A Cross-cultural Approach to Business English

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Abstract: The cultural competence training is becoming a must for the Romanian professionals in economics to get them ready to integrate the multicultural family in Europe. The article makes reference to the cross-culture competence engineering and training through business English programme carried out by eMulticult project (91068/2007-10) which produced an educational portal for interactive learning. The research follows the European Commission Strategy for Multilinguism and it develops specific cross-culture concepts and theory. The pedagogical approach is based on the 1990's revised version of Bloom's taxonomy carried out by Anderson and Krathwohl (2000). The results and conclusions are drawn by surveys and case study research and dedicated to the development of a new strategy of academic applied English programmes. The key contribution of the paper lies on the pedagogical insights of cross-cultural approach in business English.

Keywords: business English; cross-cultural competence; corporate culture; professional integration

1. Introduction

The *cross-cultural competence* and *globalization* in international cooperation are derived from professional openness, understanding, and flexibility which make possible the development of multinational businesses, free movement of human resources and sky-rocketing outcomes of research, technology and innovations in all professional domains.

It is high time for the education and instructional policy makers to focus on the need to match the cultural competence training with the business effectiveness needs of the cross or mixed cultural corporate groups. It is time to train the cross-cultural competence to get the Romanian professionals ready to join the big professional cross-cultural family of European Union. This demands not only cultural literacy, but also in-depth and application-oriented understanding, openness, tolerance to the otherness of a new culture patterns and integration skills.

2. Cross-Cultural Competence

The cross-cultural approach in teaching business English proposed for the academic education is based on the four perspectives model of Ulla Lundgren (Lundgren U., 2004; 2005): *a) communication skills in a foreign language, b) cultural competences specific to the foreign language, c) intercultural competences facilitating the natural behavior in the cultural environment of the foreign language*, and *d) organizational communication competences*, that develop the ability to interact efficiently in a new organizational culture, where the foreign language learned is the formal language of the organization.

The specific competences targeted are translated into the reference framework of *foreign language, cultural knowledge* and *organizational culture knowledge* which are compared to the *student's mother tongue* and its *set of cultural values*, facilitating the development of a natural behavior in a different professional culture environment.(*see Table 1*)

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3. Pedagogical Engineering of the Cross-Cultural Competence

The pedagogical processing of the cross-cultural business English contributes to the development of a group learning community, facilitating the collaborative processes oriented, problem solving, new ideas and knowledge creation. It includes various tactics and tools, stimulates the cognitive and affective processes and leads to the internalization of new corporate cultural values and knowledge, and to the development of a natural behavior in a new professional and social environment.

The cross-cultural approach of business English articulates with the *educational theories* from the level of knowledge acquisition to the one of attitude development. The proposed perspective is based on the *socio-constructivism* learning *theory* (*Piaget, 2001; Doise* and *Mugny, 1978*) which stimulates student's capacity to adapt and react adequately to the otherness of a new cultural and organizational environment. This approach makes possible the development of various *pedagogical strategies* (cognitive learning: Shekan, P 2003; contextual learning: Brooks, I. G. and Brooks, M. G. 1999); *active teaching and learning models* (problem-based learning: Savin-Baden, Major, 2004; project-development learning: Knoll, M. 1997); *learning media:* (blended learning: Garrison, D. R.; Vaughan, N.D., 2008; web-based learning: (Schroeder, R. 2002); computer mediated learning: (Gonzalez-Lloret, M. 2008); face-to-face learning: (Stein, D.S. (2003); *learning activities* (Trofimovich, P.; McDonough, K. (2011) simulations, games, brain storming, etc.), *education formats* (lecture, tutorial, independent learning, distance learning, small/large groups etc. (Salcedo, C.S. 2009). (*see Table 2*)

The *corporate culture value* topics will include corporate identity and design, communication, behavior, philosophy, time management, product management, foundation of a firm/company, organization of an enterprise, working hours, brand and advertising, trade fair/exhibition, banking, business lunch, documents management in a company, waste management in a company (Black, Richard J., 2004). These topics will also include a comparison approach to the Romanian organization cultural dimension (Rogojinaru, Adela, 2009; Ionescu, Gh. 1996).

The process of identifying and defining the specific *cross cultural competences* needed to be acquired and trained by the Romanian students of business English is closely based on the study of the concepts and principles in the domain: *cross cultural adaptation*, (Bennett, 1999), *intercultural efficiency* (Cui &Van Den Berg, 1991), *cross-cultural competence* (Johnson, James P., Lenartowicz, Tomasz; Apud, Salvador (2006), *cross cultural intelligence:* Ang, S., & Van Dyne, L., (2008), *effective cultural communication*, (Dodd, C.H. 1997), *cross cultural communication competence* (Kim, 1984; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997), etc.

The *learning goals, criteria and levels* of the cross-cultural competence to be trained by students of the business English programme are limited to the *cross-cultural understanding* and *openness attitude development*, and based on the research of Bryram and Morgan (1994) on the development of empathical knowledge and cross cultural behavior. We suggest a portfolio of *criteria and standards* focusing on direct individual and group interaction with the specific cultural environment that enable effective cross-cultural work in business according to its corporate values and principles. Cultural skills under consideration are needed to progress from *cultural awareness* and *knowledge* stage to the *cultural intelligence* model supported by Christopher Earley (2003; 2006) (*see Table 3*).

The sub-divisions of the cross-culture competence for business English that we opted for are *flexibility* and *openness. Flexibility* refers to that attitude making individuals adapt to a new cultural and social environment which display a specific attitude and behavior in business interaction. *Flexibility* develops the ability of observation and selection of the most suitable behavior. *Openness* is the cultural ability of accepting individuals coming from another cultural environment and the development of professional and social relationship with them. *Openness* means an active role in an unfamiliar cultural environment that can be even a hostile one.

4. Conclusions

The cross-cultural competence makes professionals able to find adjusted, adapted, re-invented strategies in dealing with new culture situations.

The cross-cultural approach of business English emphasizes on treating learners as active problem-solving persons by involving them in real-life learning situations. It also provides the assessment and testing tools for a self-evaluation, tracking the individual training progress. The approach of cross-cultural business English encourages wide participation and contribution of the students in the training contents and the cross-cultural dialogue.

The innovative approach of the cross-culture business English consists in the content-based environment and the active pedagogy used to develop specific cross-culture competence which is translated into a positive, flexible, integrative behavior development.

Educational packages for individual beneficiaries can be adapted to virtual or blended learning classes, formal or informal educational networks etc It offers the premise for building the empathic attitude, through a deep understanding of the own cultural matrix and a greater permeability to the behavior and values of another cultural and organizational environment, increasing the degree of cross-cultural communication and integration of specialists in economics.

Table 1 – Cross-cultural Business English framework

Dimension	Competence
A. Communication L1 – mother language L2 – foreign language	Reading comprehension Listening comprehension Writing Speaking
B. Culture C1 – trainee's culture C2 – the culture of the learnt foreign language	*General cultural behavior, ideas, perceptions, art, belief, literature, history, music* etc.
C. Cross-culture X – intercultural communication competences	*adaptability, tolerance, empathy, flexibility, cultural identity, social constructivism*
D. Organizational culture Y – organizational communication competence	Recognition and use of *organizational culture patterns, communication stereotypes and procedures*

Table 2: Levels and dimensions of the Cross culture competence structure development

Cognitive dimension	Pedagogical approach	Specific tactics
Knowledge acquisition	Instructionalism	knowledge transfer
Comprehension	Constructivism	Actions, facts, simulations,
Application	Collaborative learning	Brain storming, games, debates
Synthesis/Analysis	Learning by problems	Mutual problem solving tasks, simulations, debates
Knowledge creation/evaluation	Learning by projects	Project development Innovative solutions, self assessment

Table 3 –Dimensions of the cross-cultural educational approach

Level	Domain	Dimension	Definition	Competences/behavior
1	Cognitive	Knowledge	Acquisition and recollection of previously learned basic language knowledge	• Ability to reproduce basic knowledge • recognize, arrange, define, duplicate, label, list, relate, etc)
	Affective	Awareness (Receiving)	Sensitivity and willingness to tolerate new ideas, approaches, attitudes, behaviors)	• Perception of cultural and organizational differences • Ability to differentiate, accept, respond
	Pragmatic	Basic language use	Basic language use in the organizational environment	• Understand/use of everyday specific English for specific purposes • interactions with native or non-native English speakers
2	Cognitive	Comprehension	Ability to grasp the meaning/message of specific English	• use the acquired knowledge through translations/interpretation • classify, describe, discuss, explain, express, identify, indicate, locate, report, select, translate
	Affective	Involvement (Responding)	Commitment to the organizational culture	• understand/react appropriately according to the cultural& organizational environment standards
	Pragmatic	Extended basic language use	Extended basic language use specific to the organizational environment	• Complex interaction within the social/organizational environment • extended basic language; • appropriate reaction
3	Cognitive	Application	Selection/transfer of knowledge in a new context	• use the concepts for solving a specific issue • apply, choose, demonstrate, illustrate, interpret, operate, practice, schedule, solve, use, write
	Affective	Valuing	Critical perception of new set of values	• evaluate ideas, materials, phenomena, behaviors • expression of opinions • development of specific attitude/behavior • debate/support/evaluate
	Pragmatic	Standard language use	Communication effectiveness	• Effective professional/social interaction • standard language • appropriate openness attitude
4	Cognitive	Analysis	Appropriate perception of cross-culture content/form	• compare similarities/differences to develop new understanding • analyze/appraise/categorize/criticize/ differentiate/distinguish/examine/exp eriment/question/test
	Affective	Organization	Bring the two cultures into a harmonious/internally consistent philosophy	• generalize/act according to the accepted values • theorize/formulate/balance
	Pragmatic	Specialized	Appropriate	• Fluent communication and adequate

		language use	understanding/interpretation of complex texts; concrete/abstract topics	behavior even in complex situations
5	Cognitive	Synthesis	Development of creative communication patterns/structures	• develop new ideas/opinions/solutions on a given theme • arrange/assemble/collect/compose, construct/create/design/develop/formulate/manage/organize/plan/propose/set up/write)
	Affective	Characterization by value set	Consistent act/behavior in accordance with the specific corporate accepted values	• compare/accept/act in accordance with the new corporate values • revise/require/avoid/resist/manage/resolve
	Pragmatic	Specialized oral/written language use according to organizational patterns	Understand/use of complex texts/organizational patterns	• Fluent/flexible use of specialized language • well-structured/detailed communication on complex subjects • specific organizational patterns/connectors/cohesive devices • internalization of the cultural/organizational set of values
6	Cognitive	Evaluation & Knowledge creation	Evaluate/accept/produce corporate conceptual/material values according to organizational relevance	• develop/design/create new elements/topics in the given set of values
	Affective	Internalization	Integration/development; empathy towards the otherness cultures	• act according to the internalized set of values • demonstrate objectivity/coherence in solving specific issues • empathic behavior etc
	Pragmatic	Advanced use of specific business English	Coherent/detailed communication in various media	• effective communication • adequate reaction in complex situations

5. Acknowledgement

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