

The Importance of Understanding and Accepting the Variety in the Education Process of Intercultural Competences



Linguistics

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Erion Avllazagaj

**University "Aleksandër Xhuvani". Faculty of Human Sciences.
English & German Department. Elbasan. Albania.**

Abstract

All living cultures are outcomes of intercultural communication. Human history is the tail of such journeys. This becomes particularly evident in the globalization era where the ever last involving cultural landscape is characterized by an intensified diversity of peoples, communities and individuals who leave more and more closely. The increasing diversity of cultures which is fluid, dynamic and transformative implies specific competences and capacities for individuals and societies to learn, re-learn and unlearn, so as to meet personal fulfillment and social harmony. The ability to decipher other cultures in fair and meaningful ways is predicated not only on an open and pluralistic spirit but also on self-cultural awareness. When a culture is critically aware of its own strengths and limitations, it can extend its horizons and enrich its intellectual and spiritual resources by learning from alternative visions in epistemology, ethics, aesthetics and worldviews.

“Understanding a foreigner means possessing the power to act”¹. More than concrete knowledges, it is about strategic knowledges and sensitivity in dealing with the differences and that is unknown, be these conditional changes due to different cultures or just changes that are related to different human natures. In this way, this educational purpose hides on one side a general pedagogical character and on the other hand serves as a prerequisite for the specific formation of intercultural competence.

Understanding the cultural differences (*e.g. within the process of foreign language cultural education*) is based first of all on the ability to create empathy and to get perspective. It requires someone to try to understand something “not in its context but in foreign context”. Empathy involves in this case the willingness to establish itself in position of the others, to perceive the world from their point of view and to seek a better understanding of their position. It is about the cognitive-analytical and emotional sense of the inner view of others, to see the world through its eyes and to draw conclusions based on its condition, motives, attitudes, assessments and to reach to a general conclusion of his situation.²

Every process of understanding itself is related to the unknown perspective or differences, as we strive to understand something we have not known so far, so it is something new that is added to the knowledge so far through the hermeneutical process of understanding. To achieve this, it is very often necessary to get the perspective of the other, since it is only this full coordination of

¹Herbert Krist & Michael K. Legutke (Ed.). *The diversity Acceptance between theory and practice. Works from the graduate college "Didactics of Understanding"*. Tübingen: Fool, 2000, kap. XXXVIII.

²Shinshke & Andrea. *Perspective takeover as a basic ability in dealing with People*. In: Lotar Bredela, Herbert Krist (ed.): *Didactics of understanding others*. Tübingen: Fool (Giessen contributions to foreign language didactics), 1995, 36-50, f. 39

perspectives that will provide a complete understanding of reality. If I really want to understand someone, I must move to his place and see the world with his eyes. Taking a perspective is a fundamental skill in dealing with others and with the differences, and thus constitutes what Hunfeld calls “Fulfillment of life”.

The development of empathy and the ability to change perspective include in itself dimensions social, ethical and humanitarian issues that are constructive both for personal and intercultural understanding. Understanding the foreigner as a condition for the other to be accepted and tolerated to enter into a dialogue with equal rights to oneself and the acquaintance. In order to be able to penetrate the inner view of another, you must first perceive yourself, your imaginings and ways of thinking, as any kind of perception is self-centered. In this kind of copying you can understand that the view and your way of giving birth is not the only one that exists and at best you can get some sort of “Distancing from yourself”³.

It also relates to the notion that the attitude itself does not see it as the only correct variant but they manage to overcome the tire's perspectives and be open to new perspectives. Together with the bonds and the ability to exercise the tolerance and acceptance of the other as something solid in itself even when it changes many of its own. In this way, the relativization of views that has so far been considered the only valid point of view is achieved. So meeting with a foreigner sets a prerequisite and willingness to accept the acceptance of this change of view.

Thus, the formation and support of the meaning of a foreigner is primarily aimed at raising awareness of the subjectivity and relativity of his or her viewpoint and the development of an open mind for new perspectives and views. Only if these conditions can be possible to reach an open dialogue between different perspectives aimed at mutual understanding. This kind of coping with the views has taken different names within the didactics of the meaning of foreigners, among which can be ranked “Coordination Perspectives” or “Transformation and transition from the own to the stranger and from the inside perspective to the outside perspective”.

But here it is not about sharing one's position with another and for a correct or incorrect statement of one or the other perspective. The most important thing is to place the tolerance and acceptance of the other as well as a deeper understanding of the self at the center of the foreigner's understanding. As mentioned above, foreigner or foreign text should not necessarily be understood as a member of another culture or a foreign text. It can be said that the foreign does not exist as an anticipated component, but an identity is formed and always consists of different national, regional, ethnic, age and gender components.⁴

³Bredela, Lotar; Herbert Krist; Mikael K. Legutke (Ed.) Understanding differences between theory and Practice, Works from the graduate college “Didactics and Understanding” Tubingen: Fool, 2000, cal XX!

⁴Majksner, Johana. Learning in the as-if: theory and practice of aesthetic experience in foreign language teaching. Tübingen. Fool, 2001, f. 65)

In this way, differences between oneself and the foreign differences may be conditioned both by culture and by other factors, such as age, gender, socialization, and other personalities. Foreigners coming to because of the culture or the language does not differ much in principle from other forms of foreign appearances. Therefore, the ability to enter into relationships with him is “a general” and not unique ability and linked to a different experience in dealing with a foreigner. In the process of dealing with the foreign things, whether because of different cultures or not, there is always a kind of gap between her and the acquaintance, and this gap must be overcome. Therefore, the main purpose of a learning process focusing on ‘foreigners understanding’ is not a teaching purpose that is related only to the subject, much more is a pedagogical purpose, namely, “Education in relationship with a foreigner.”⁵

In this way, the focus is not simply on the work the student should do to understand the literary text, but above all the reflection and personal interaction between students and teachers with their different backgrounds of experiences and different individual values. Precisely in this interaction and these dialogues to understand, one can achieve recognition and positioning of oneself, formation and representation of personal opinion as well as social interaction, which taken together constitute important pedagogical principles.

According to Hunfeld, his intense understanding constitutes is the most important dimension of the foreigner's understanding. It is precisely the interest of the one who brings "Curiosity for the Differences" whose change emphasizes even more its outline. In this way, the relationship with others and with each other is an opportunity of helping to better understand the native culture. For people, engagement with others or differences affects first and foremost in themselves and automatically they begin to compare the differences with oneself.⁶

The concept of foreigner's understanding should not only be seen as an understanding of another culture but also in the sense of a communicative interaction, mutual exchange of understanding between students about their experiences and imaginings. Only through dialogue and interaction among students can be highlighted the differences between the self and the foreign Concept.

The purpose is for the foreigner to be recognized as such and to be accepted and tolerated in its nature. The ability to understand the others, the foreign, is not based solely on the tolerance and acceptance of the other and the differences, but it must be supported in the process of learning foreign languages in a procedural manner. This is also the basis of intercultural communication skills and thus also “The main condition for peace and understanding among

⁵Shinshke, Andrea. Perspective takeover as a basic ability in dealing with people. In: Lotar Bredela, Herbert Krist (ed.): Didactics of understanding others. Tübingen: Fool (Giessen contributions to foreign language didactics), 1995, 36-50, f. 37

⁶Hunfeld, Hans. Prolegomena to a hermeneutic foreign language teaching. in learning German 1/1999, f. 6

peoples”⁷.

Precisely in today's where globalization occupies a key place, intercultural competence occupies a central place and is a key qualification in social relationships between people of different backgrounds. In the context of learning foreign languages, the meaning of the differences in its basic form in the sense of understanding one with another cultural background, or specific cultural component intentionally intersects and the additional meaning is the intense exchange of cultural differences between the native cultures with the foreign one. In this case, the distance to be overcome between the self and the foreign culture is different from that in the case of efforts to understand, made by members of the same culture. This distance results from the historical development of the languages of the respective societies and therefore presents a central problem of foreign understanding and intercultural learning in the context of foreign language learning.

A didactic of foreign understanding helps to understand the other culture through the development and support of the ability to change, take, and coordinate the perspective. For this reason, learning foreign languages built on the understanding of a foreigner is always a process of teaching on the country, culture, but it also has a transnational and intercultural character.⁸

Learning foreign languages in the sense of learning a foreign language and intercultural learning in its entirety, sensitizes cultural changes and their treatment and does not deal much with the delivery of concrete knowledge. Krum formulates as follows this task of learning foreign languages:

“The more people grow into their own language and the patterns of thought and action associated with that language and culture and value systems, the more difficult they are to accept another culture apart from their own, to consider diversity as normal. Teaching foreign languages has the important function of keeping young people open, being open minded, of protecting them from rigid ethnocentrism, to which a monolingual educational system may contribute”⁹

Attention to culture is thus a very important teaching goal. In this way, the formation of The intercultural understanding of the foreign cultures or “cultural awareness” becomes another main goal of the modern literature teaching alongside the general pedagogical goal of dealing with the differences of the other in general. Intercultural learning should educate for “Accepting the normality of a foreigner” where both the self and the foreigner find the relevant justification.

⁷ Lotar Bredela & Herbert Krist (ed.): Didactics of understanding others. Tübingen: Föhl (Giessen contributions to foreign language didactics), 1995, 36-50, f. 41.

⁸ Bredela, Lotar / Krist, Herbert. Didactics of understanding others. Gunter Narr Verlag, 1995, f. 12.

⁹ Krum, Hans Jyrgen. Neighbor languages as a challenge. In: Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages Between Globalization and Regionalization, ed. Herbert Krist / Lotar Bredela / Franc-Joseph-Majsner. Gunter Narr Verlag, 2001, f. 29.

The basis for intercultural learning processes constitutes awareness of its cultural identity. Formation of intercultural competence. The ability to understand the phenomena of another culture based on the personal cultural background is based on the fundamental pillars of the different understanding - changing the perspective, taking and coordinating the other perspective. According to Bolten, it consists of the ability of empathy, the ability of tolerance towards other worlds, the tolerance of ambiguity, the ability to recognize and endorse what is different, to be open to new, familiar and unfamiliar worldview, and the distance of roles, i.e. the ability to gain insight into its limited perspectives and the ability to look at itself in a critical perspective.¹⁰

Usually, other culture phenomena are judged from a personal perspective that is culturally defined. To look at the thinking and the deeds of people of another culture is a temporary abandonment of the experiences, concepts and ways of interpreting the parent culture, as well as the imaginative acquisition of another culturally defined perception center it means "Taking the perspective of the other or the foreigner".

Changing the perspective has implications for the personal meaning of the person because the meeting with the foreigner confronts unsustainable thought patterns and perceptions up to that point with alternatives that question the family concepts. "In the context of foreign language and culture learning, intercultural competence implies "Ability to relativize the concepts of personal culture". This includes, on the one hand, awareness of the conditions of understanding the parent culture and, on the other hand, the attempt to understand foreign culture from the viewpoint of its members.

It is about forming acceptance and tolerance far more than taking over the foreign. The foreign should be perceived and accepted as something independent. Instead of a complete understanding of the foreign culture in the center, the relation between the external and the internal perspective is established in coordination of perspectives. The teaching of foreign languages and with it and of foreign cultures is thus taken with the "Tension between understanding and empathy".

The full meaning of the other or the foreign things can never be achieved since any understanding process - both intra and intercultural - is an infinite process. The other person's expressions and what he has intended or meant to be can only be taken from the basis of those known until that moment. A one-to-one relation between people, whether of the same cultural circle or of different circles, can never exist because according to Bredela, culture is action and interaction, and this also applies to the intercultural understanding of the foreign cultures. The latter is not just the acquisition of knowledge, but it is an action with the help of these knowledge where it should be said that the latter are always limited and incomplete.¹¹

¹⁰Bolten, Jyrgen. Intercultural Competence. National Center for Political Education Thuringen, 2001, f. 85.

¹¹Bredela, Lotar. Objectives Intercultural language teaching. In: Bredela, Lotar / Delano, Verner (ed.): Intercultural Language Teaching. Tübingen: Narr.85-120, 1999)

Conclusions

For this reason, in the process of learning the language and culture, students should be sensitized regarding the fact that there are different prerequisites of understanding and sometimes different phenomena, interpretations and evaluations may differ from one another. In this context even non-understanding takes on a very important role. Intercultural learning of foreign language is not solely responsible for a deep understanding of foreign culture by conveying concrete knowledge about it. He should also sensitize and make it clear that another (foreign) culture can never be fully understood.

In this way, the foreign language teaching practice prepares students for real meetings with members of foreign culture, but also insists on the fact that even with abundant knowledge about another culture, misunderstandings, misconceptions can still occur or misunderstanding and that mastering a language in itself does not serve as a guarantee for understanding the alien. Therefore, in this process of foreigner's understanding, it is always possible to aim at changing, taking and coordinating perspectives, but the other, the foreign should to remain as such to a certain extent.

Hunfeld explains that if the foreign may remain different, then all attempts to fully embrace it in its own conceptual sense are excessive. Hence, various conversations during the lesson related to textual or dialogue interpretations should not have the primary goal of accurate and objective understanding but rather channeled more in open exchanges on personal experiences with their own and foreign culture and in one sensitization for a possible misunderstanding. To return to Hunfeld again: "Being otherwise justifies itself even when it is not understood from the other ".So if learning foreign languages does not aim at a complete understanding of cultures, but is more based on the work done by conveying the efforts that are made between its own and the foreign perspective, then it really turns into a "third country" where their own and foreign culture and language culture are transported to enter into dialogue and to understand one another.

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