

Educational Training of Future Diplomats with a Focus on the Development of Intercultural Competences in the Context of Intercultural Communication

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Abstract Intercultural communication is considered to be a form of communication that helps members of other cultures to understand the multicultural environment. In the age of globalization, emphasizing the importance of intercultural communication is extremely important. Understanding other cultures also applies to workers in international relations and diplomacy. Diplomats often come into contact not only with other diplomats who are prepared for cultural differences, but also with ordinary people, so cultural competencies can help them communicate. Intercultural communication does not only mean cultural understanding, it includes behavior in intercultural situations and understanding the differences in opinions, behaviors, values or habits of members of other communities. Its position and importance in the process of educational training of future diplomats is therefore irreplaceable.

Key words diplomat, culture, education, intercultural competences, communication

1. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE - DEFINITION OF BASIC TERMS

In connection with the current trend of interdisciplinarity in the current scientific environment, many aspects of research in individual fields are intertwined. It is not possible to examine an individual issue without a link to other phenomena that are closely related to it. From this point of view, one also looks at the language, which is no longer understood only as a summary of grammatical, stylistic or lexical components, but above all as a flexible tool of communication, influenced by users, environment and specific situation. These pragmatic aspects also determine the education and active use of a foreign language. Under the influence of current global phenomena - migration, removal of cultural and linguistic barriers, or geopolitical borders, the environment is also examined in the environment of international relations and diplomacy in terms of intercultural communication. Related to this is the use of language not only as a mediator of information, but mainly as a bearer of cultural, historical, social and geographical connotations. The environment of international relations and diplomacy reflects the changing conditions of operation, related in particular to

advancing globalization, technological progress, but also to negative phenomena in the international environment, such as fears of terrorism. As J. Stier puts it, it seems essential that future generations, if they want to function in a global world, understand the value of intercultural competences and seek to seek knowledge and experience outside their homeland. (Stier, 2003) Many experts agree that traditional diplomacy is gradually being replaced by "reciprocity" diplomacy. Mr Nye emphasizes that diplomacy was substantially changed by the end of the Cold War, economic globalization and the technological revolution, and that the "hard power" of military force should therefore be replaced by "soft power", represented by the ability to communicate effectively and use multilateral institutions. (Nye, 1990) Helena K. Finn argues that instead of military force, "dialogue is necessary to win the hearts and minds of moderate elements in societies vulnerable to radicalism." (Finn, 2003, p. 20) The prerequisite for successful operation in diplomatic practice in such changed conditions requires not only professional preparation, but also excellent knowledge of a foreign language, together with knowledge of the culture, history, traditions or specifics of its users. This results in the irreplaceable position of intercultural communication in the process of education (not only) of future diplomats.

1.1 Communication

From the point of view of examining language as a mediator of communication¹, the pragmatic aspect is very important - that is, the analysis of the situation in which the process of communication takes place. In the field of diplomacy, communication plays a key role, as it conveys information through a communication channel in a certain communication situation. The current environment of international relations is changing, also in connection with the opening of borders or increasing migration. Despite advancing globalization, in today's world of diplomacy, any communication requires a broad knowledge of other cultures and their traditions, customs, so we can characterize it as intercultural communication. The phenomenon of intercultural communication is increasingly becoming part of scientific fields such as international relations, linguistics, sociology and psychology. In line with the current trend

¹ Communication as a transfer of information between at least two participants

of interdisciplinarity, there is therefore an overlap of individual disciplines, which examine this issue from several perspectives. In the current European scientific environment, also based on the recommendations of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe², the term intercultural communication is preferred to multicultural communication³, which is more typical of the American cultural community and relates to the needs and specifics of a multicultural society. The meaningful content of the term intercultural communication reflects the current political, economic and social situation in Europe, especially in connection with the ongoing migration crisis and the reactions of some leading European politicians to the situation. The reluctance of some groups of migrants to adapt to cultural, political and economic conditions in the new country (the so-called intercultural barrier), together with minimum language skills, results in the need to further explore various aspects of intercultural communication in order to stabilize the situation. For the purposes of our paper, we will be based on the definition of intercultural communication by the Czech author J. Průcha, who characterizes it as "denoting processes of interaction and transmission, taking place in different types of situations in which communicating partners are members of linguistically and / or culturally different ethnicities, nations, racial or social communities. This communication is determined by the specifics of the languages, cultures, mentalities and value systems of the communicating partners." (Průcha, 2010, p.16) In the academic literature, the term intercultural communication first appears in the work of the American anthropologist E. T. Hall "The Silent Language" from 1959. In the conditions of Slovak and Czech scientific approaches, the term intercultural communication is sometimes used, which, for example, Lehmanová defines as "a reflection of the communication process between individual and supra-individual subjects belonging to different cultural systems." (Lehmanová, 1999, p. 21)

1.2 Culture

The term culture has a wide application in the social sciences. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines culture as the usual beliefs, social forms and material characteristics of a racial, religious or social group; also: characteristics of everyday existence (such as diversity or way of life) shared by people on the spot or in time; or a set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular area, activity, or social characteristic; or an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behaviour that depends on the ability to learn and pass on knowledge to future generations⁴. It follows from the above definitions that culture is a complex structure that manifests itself at all levels of society. In general, we can consider culture as the social heritage of a community (organized group or society). It is a pattern of reactions developed or created during the development of such a community in solving problems that have arisen in the interaction between its members and between them and their environment. These reactions are considered in the community to be the right way of perceiving, feeling, thinking and acting and are passed on to new members through observation and learning. Culture determines what is acceptable or unacceptable to the community, important or insignificant, right or wrong, feasible or unrealizable. It includes all learned and shared information, beliefs, norms and values, as well as attitudes, behaviour, clothing and language.

² Opinions are included in the 2006 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning, available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/SK/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32006H0962&from=EN>

³ Multicultural communication represents the specifics and forms of communication in a multicultural society in which members of different cultures occur, with a certain degree of assimilation

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>

1.3 Cultural stereotypes

The term stereotype⁵ is now used to refer to an easily accessible image of a social group, which is usually based on rough generalizations. Although stereotypes can be both positive and negative, in everyday use they are most often understood as irrational negative attitudes towards certain social groups and their members. Stereotypes are called idiosyncratic if they are used only by the individual, or they are social or collective if they are widely shared by a group of people. The less a person knows about an object or group, the more they use stereotypical generalizations to reduce their uncertainty in a new situation. In an intercultural environment, one of the goals of the communication participant is to know the attitudes and personality of the communication partner, while applying his previous beliefs about the members of this cultural group, the so-called cultural stereotypes. Interestingly, most people have positive ideas about their nation, while others are critical. For example, most Slovaks believe that we are a hard-working and hospitable nation, but Hungarians usually consider themselves noisy, Scots as greedy, Italians as noisy. Stereotypes are considered detrimental to intercultural communication and their elimination is considered a prerequisite for any successful intercultural exchange. The communicator tends to prefer information that is in line with existing expectations and tends to ignore or reject information that is not in line with stereotypes. Stereotypical notions of the other party's communicants determine a person's emotional reactions. Dealing with stereotypes in intercultural education is problematic, but it is necessary to point them out in the educational process. Educators need to respect a large number of variables that allow different cultures to be compared (see section 2).

1.4 Intercultural communication in diplomatic practice and its relevance in relation to international diplomacy

As mentioned in previous sections, communication plays a key role in diplomacy. The most important means of communication in the process of communication (although not the only one) is language. Prerequisite for successful communication is knowledge of language means (their meaning) and grammatical rules, which we refer to as language competence. The production and interpretation of language units in a particular situation is called performance. For example, M. Hirschová describes pragmatic competence as a competent way of using competently formed sentences depending on the communication situation. (Hirschová, 2006) However, the author herself adds that any rule of language use will sooner or later be reflected in its structure and therefore the exact boundary between language and communication competence cannot be defined. We can basically characterize communication as a certain way of solving a problem (correct decoding of the meaning of words), in which various factors, conditions and strategies are applied. The condition for the active use of language (mother tongue and foreign) are productive communication skills, which are used not only for communication, but also for obtaining information and knowledge. In the field of diplomacy, we can define several factors that belong to the professional equipment of a person active in the diplomacy environment. The diplomat should be able to adequately express and argue, he should master politeness and social phrases and also actively master the idiomatic side of the language, which reflects the cultural and historical background of its development (see section 3). The basis for these skills will be acquired by the graduate of diplomacy in the process of their educational training, but their development depends primarily on its further practical use. The main role of a diplomat is to represent his nation through

⁵ The term stereotype was first used by Walter Lippmann in 1922

communication with representatives of other cultures. To make full use of his knowledge, skills and argumentation skills, he primarily uses language as a mediator of communication. Each language is influenced by historical development and culture, so the current approach to communication (not only) in diplomacy is currently preferred from an intercultural point of view. These cultural differences are referred to in diplomacy as „the *raison d'être*” and are among the primary skills of every communicant.” (Adamcová, 2018, p. 372)

2. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION OF FUTURE DIPLOMATS

The educational process of future diplomats is a complex and multidimensional process of preparing students for demanding internships in the environment of international relations. In addition to vocational education, which provides theoretical knowledge, the acquisition of intercultural competences through foreign language teaching is an essential part. The curriculum of individual language groups is extensive in terms of thematic focus and does not focus on passive reception of information, but mainly on the analysis of key elements of the field and critical thinking. The result of such a comprehensive training is a graduate who understands and respects the differences and specifics of other cultures, is able to perform adequately and communicate effectively in a multilingual and culturally different environment. The main goal of the educational training of students of international relations and diplomacy is to provide quality knowledge of international relations, geopolitics, political science, sociology, history, which will provide them with the expertise necessary for their further work. Equally important, however, is the comprehensive information base on other cultures with which they will be confronted in their practice. As Lehmanová argues, “subjects of intercultural communication enter the communication process with different, culture-determined cognitive and emotional structures, with different ways of perceiving and evaluating reality.” (Lehmanová, 1999, p. 21) Many studies have confirmed that misinterpreted elements of such communication can lead not only to mutual misunderstanding of communicants, but also to serious international conflicts in the conditions of international diplomacy. Most people, despite their education and the strict rules of the protocol, tend to consider their cultural norms to be correct, and these preconditions create the conditions for racism, xenophobia, or ethnocentrism. To sum it up, the condition for successful intercultural communication in the field of international relations is the acquisition of quality intercultural competencies in the process of educational training of future diplomats.

2.1 Intercultural competences

Within the research of intercultural communication, a category of intercultural competence (intercultural competences) appears, which Průcha defines as “the ability of an individual to implement appropriate skills of effective communication using acquired knowledge of the specifics of national cultures and cooperation with members of other cultures”. (Průcha, 2010, s. 46) It is a complex summary of an individual's abilities and skills, which can be divided into three basic groups:

- cognitive competence (CC) - the way of thinking in a given situation, awareness of prejudices, stereotypes and gaining new knowledge about another culture;
- affective competence (AC) - a way of experiencing a given situation, using empathy and assertiveness to adapt to new cultural conditions;

- behavioural competence (BC) - a way of behaving in a given situation, which represents manifestations of verbal and nonverbal communication, the ability to resolve conflicts and problems in a new cultural situation.
(compiled according to Morgensternová, Šulová et al., 2007, pp. 10-14)

The most important aspects of intercultural competences that are developed in the educational training of future diplomats include:

- emphasis on self-reflection (CC)
- defining one's own cultural values, norms, traditions and connotations and their significance for the individual (CC)
- empathy (AC)
- intercultural adaptability (AC)
- ability of adequate intercultural communication (BC)
- adequate resolution of conflicts and problems arising from the differences of other cultures (BC)
- ability to cooperate in intercultural working groups (BC)

By acquiring new language competencies, but above all new knowledge about other cultures, we try to develop in students:

- identification of similarities and differences between one's own and other cultures (CC)
- getting closer to thinking and behaviour of members of other cultures (CC)
- tolerance and openness to other cultures without barriers and negative attitudes, based on common prejudices and stereotypes (CC)
- ability to adapt based on sensitivity to another mentality (AC)
- ability to identify, evaluate and correctly interpret patterns of emotional behaviour of members of those cultures (AC)
- conflict resolution strategies (BC)
- teamwork (BC)
- skills of verbal and non-verbal communication - acquire language skills at a high level, including the most specific parts of the language - phraseological units (for more details see section 3), eliminate communication noise, respect the formal rules of conduct in other cultures (BC).

The above criteria provide a basis for developing students' skills in intercultural communication. It is necessary to train all categories of intercultural competencies (cognitive, affective and behavioural), because only in mutual interaction do they create a full and complex structure, suitable for use in different situations. Based on the training, future diplomats develop new attitudes towards other cultures, they are led to develop the ability to communicate with respect to cultural specifics, without prejudice and uncertainty arising from possible communication barriers. Therefore, teachers with a high level of knowledge, as well as social and cultural maturity, should be involved in higher education in international relations and diplomacy, ready to provide their students with inspiring conditions that encourage interest in cultural differences, social interaction and training of theoretical abilities and skills, such as in the form of active participation in Erasmus stays abroad. It follows from the above categories that the basic condition for acquiring adequate intercultural competences and respecting the specifics of other cultures is the language skills of the individual. The aim of language teaching is to provide knowledge, skills and abilities that will provide graduates with an adequate basis for further development in practice, with regard to their future work in a multicultural environment. A successful graduate should have in-depth language skills, a broad overview of individual cultures and sufficient respect for diversity to be able to respond naturally to the various communication situations to which he or she will be exposed.

2.2 Educational process

With regard to the goals defined in the previous section, foreign language teaching at the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica is oriented not only to acquire adequate language skills and abilities, but especially to get acquainted with and subsequent training of advanced, intercultural competencies, which graduates later transform into successful intercultural communication in practice. The curriculum in individual language groups is set uniformly, but due to the current work we will focus on the penetration of intercultural communication in the teaching of English (1st foreign language). The situation in this case is specific, as we assume that most students come to study already proficient enough (due to previous studies in secondary schools), that means the level of general language B2 - C1⁶. Based on such assumptions, English language teaching emphasizes not only the knowledge of professional terminology that prepares them for professional discussions and argumentation, but above all the acquisition of knowledge of Anglo-Saxon culture and thus the development of their intercultural competencies (see section 2.1). The individual subjects follow each other, complement each other and build a gradual superstructure, necessary for further work in practical diplomacy. Each of the subjects in terms of intercultural communication provides three basic components:

- theoretical basis - the essence of cultural differences (historical development, cultural, political, social and economic specifics)
- practical application - analysis of similarities and differences of other cultures with the student's own culture
- personality component - analysis of the student's own culture, background of the individual view of other cultures.

At the beginning of the study, the student is also mediated by the theoretical characteristics of individual components of intercultural communication. Basic definitions of culture, communication and intercultural competencies will create a precondition for fulfilling the goals of individual subjects. For concretization, we analyze in detail the content of subjects focused on the history and realities of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The main objectives of the mentioned subjects are to provide:

- the terminological basis needed for the competent use of knowledge and skills
- general information on culture as well as specific aspects characterizing each cultural specificity
- the basis for creating adequate intercultural communication
- training in the ability to adapt to a culturally specific situation based on a comparative analysis of the typology, values and traditions of one's own and other cultures.

The content of the subjects includes the following aspects (of course with the possibility of change, extension or reduction, or adaptation to the language level of a particular group of students):

- the historical development of the country (in our case, with regard to the teaching of the English language, it is the development of the United Kingdom and the United States of America), focusing on political, economic and military aspects
- the political system of the country, with a focus on legislation, the executive, case law
- political specifics of the country
- foreign policy and membership in international organizations

- sociological structure of the country, composition of the population, immigration, education system, religious structure
- cultural situation, traditions, standards, rules, protocol.

In terms of intercultural competences, it is necessary to focus on:

- basic terms, which include the terms culture, communication, intercultural communication, intercultural competences
- universal and specific features of cultures
- factors influencing culture (historical development, political, economic and social situation)
- verbal and non-verbal parts of communication, focusing on the most specific components of the language
- the position of intercultural communication in the media
- analysis of possible causes of problems in the process of intercultural communication, the concept of culture shock.

The practical application of theoretical knowledge consists of a complex of activities that will enable students to use the acquired knowledge. Individual aspects of intercultural communication will be used, for example, in the analysis of case studies of diverse situations in diplomatic practice with regard to cultural specifics, differences or, conversely, similarities. For the development of the necessary language competencies, it is also important to work with a professional text using critical thinking, analysis of professional materials and subsequent discussion on the analysed topics.

It is extremely important to provide future diplomats with comprehensive training from a professional, linguistic and cultural point of view. In this way, a prerequisite will be created for the successful operation of graduates in the field of international relations and diplomacy. The main goal of teaching from the position of intercultural communication is to direct students to tolerance and acceptance of other cultures based on knowledge of their values, norms and specifics.

3. CONCLUSION

We consider intercultural communication to be a form of communication that helps members of other cultures to understand the multicultural environment. The term intercultural communication includes information about the relevant culture, language, history, political and cultural connotations, but communication itself is not just about the knowledge component. Psychological and social factors also play an important role. In the current multicultural age of globalization, emphasizing the importance of intercultural communication is extremely important. Understanding other cultures also applies to employees of international relations and diplomacy, who are also being prepared for their future practice at the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. Diplomats often come into contact with members of other cultures, so it is essential that cultural competencies can help them communicate. Intercultural communication does not only mean cultural understanding, it includes behavior in intercultural situations and an understanding of differences in opinions, behaviors, values or customs of members of other communities. It concerns not only individual cultures, but also the interaction between individual actors of communication. Its position and importance in the process of educational training of future diplomats is therefore irreplaceable.

⁶ Evaluation of the level of foreign language proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, see more on <http://www2.statpe du.sk/buxus/docs/predmety/serrprejaz.pdf>

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