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INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS IN STUDENTS' ESSAYS IN THE CONTEXT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to establish to what degree the students have acquired important intercultural notions and developed awareness of their importance for successful communication. Successful international communication requires knowledge of the lexis and grammar of a foreign language, but also a strong awareness and sensitivity to cultural diversity phenomena. In the context of English studies at universities, one of the goals is to create competent communicators. Contemporary curricula thus include courses which aim to develop such types of competencies, i.e. language, linguistic, literature, and cultural courses. The English language program at the Faculty of Law and Business Studies, dr Lazar Vrkić, offers fourth-year students an Intercultural Communication and Translation course. A part of the final test is an essay on a topic reflecting an intercultural phenomenon. The essays have been analyzed through content analysis. The results reveal to what degree the students have developed intercultural awareness and/or sensitivity. Based on the results, some suggested changes to the syllabus and curriculum are offered in the conclusion.

Key words: university education, English language curriculum, interculturalism, intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, communication, translation.

1. Introduction

A traditional approach to university programs in the field of languages is to produce teachers and/or translators of the foreign language(s) in question. Today, language programs offer a starting point for many different careers due to the rapid development of digital technologies on one hand and European integrations and globalization on the other hand. When the focus is on the English language, providing a comprehensive list of possible professions after education in the field is futile. Goals of language programs are thus more useful if they specify competencies to be achieved rather than professions to follow the chosen course of education. Jurančić Petek (2012:40-41) states that the University of Maribor's English language program must prepare students for effective communication in a range of contexts and situations.

Restating the importance of European integrations and globalization in general, students seek employment worldwide and need to develop finely-tuned communicative competences—including intercultural awareness—and sensitivity should be a crucial goal (Krivokapić-Knežević & Banjević 2012: 62). Similarly, Jurančić Petek (2012:41) also states the importance of teaching “communication between different cultures”.

Tertiary educational institutions in Serbia are obliged to name goals and competencies in Standards three and four of the 'Rules and Standards' issued by the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Republic of Serbia. At FLV1, aimed competencies of the bachelor of English language studies includes communicative competencies² as a goal in and of itself and also as an inseparable aspect of all other competencies. Cultural studies and interculturalism are essential aspects of mastering successful communication especially in the context of the new millennium. To achieve such competencies the curriculum of the English program at FLV consists of academic courses aimed at developing these requirements.

1.1. *Intercultural Communication and Translation* within the context of the curriculum

Intercultural Communication and Translation is a mandatory course which focuses on the role that intercultural awareness and sensitivity play in the communication process in general as well as in the translation process, which are both important competencies within the English program. The theoretical part of the course encompasses introducing students to various aspects of intercultural communication and techniques for establishing effective intercultural communication, raising their awareness of cultural diversity both in everyday situations and business environments, and explains the concepts of intercultural sensitivity and its importance, as defined by Bennet (1998). The practical part of the course focuses on applying the theoretical knowledge in simulated situations, developing skills to recognize cultural diversity within a group, and carrying out a case study on an intercultural topic as part of the final exam.

As Bennet (1998:3) points out, the main aim of intercultural studies has been to answer the question: "How do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience?" This is a question that each individual living in a multicultural society faces every day. Due to the effects of globalization, the Internet, and international commerce and travel, people can communicate with members of different cultural communities faster and easier than ever before. Although no society throughout history has been completely monocultural, members of non-dominant cultures have traditionally been expected to adopt the values and attitudes of the host culture, and erase, or at least attempt to conceal, the existing cultural differences. Cultural assimilation, often by way of violence or harassment, has long been the force shaping modern societies (cf. Bennet 1998: 210).

Intercultural communication, on the other hand, emphasizes cultural differences in an attempt to create a climate of respect, rather than simply tolerance, for diversity. Cultural anthropologists, ethnographers, educators, as well as the earliest intercultural scholars and practitioners all agree that humans' initial response to difference is to avoid it, and if this proves impossible, to eliminate it (cf. Hall 1991, Bennet 1998). Imagining that others have values different from our own takes much more effort than to assume that they share the same values. It is therefore easier to simply apply the Golden Rule (Bennet

¹ FLV stands for *Faculty of Legal and Business Studies dr Lazar Vrkatić, Union University*.

² Full list of competencies can be found at <http://www.flv.edu.rs/>.

1998: 203), i.e. treat others the way we would like to be treated, and not acknowledge that others might not want or even respond to such treatment. The assumption of similarity is difficult to overcome, particularly with the effects of globalization and mass media, when the vast majority of people speak English, wear Western-style clothes, and communicate using electronic devices. What makes intercultural communication even more challenging is that it takes a conscious effort; it is difference-based, meaning that it should avoid assumptions of similarity and encourage considerations of difference.

As much as communication might seem a natural process, any form of communication across cultures done without conscious effort will inevitably be ethnocentric and ineffective. To achieve even a basic level of intercultural communicative competence, we need to become aware that cultural differences exist and to learn to recognize and respond to them appropriately. Bennet (1998) proposed the DMIS (Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity) in order to rank and explain the degree of awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences. The DMIS consists of six stages, the first three of which are labeled as ethnocentric, meaning that the tenets of one's own culture are experienced as central to reality. The other three stages are called ethnorelative, which means that one's own cultural patterns are seen as just one of many equally valid ways to organize reality. This model proposes that one can move from a less complex perception and modest experience of cultural difference to a more complex perception and increased sensitivity to cultural difference. The progress from one stage (or predominant experience) to another, however, takes conscious effort—more effort the further we move on the continuum from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism.

It is therefore inevitable that one starts from the position of ethnocentrism, on account of age, cognitive development level, lack of experience, etc. Some people might never progress from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism due to factors such as social status, access to education, lack of resources, inability to travel, or geographical location. Most university students will start from one of the ethnocentric positions on the continuum (Denial, Defense, Minimization). This is mostly the case even in a multicultural and multilingual environment such as Vojvodina. Bennet (1998: 10-11) warns that “multicultural” is not synonymous with “intercultural”, i.e. the fact that several cultural groups coexist in the same location still does not imply that they have successfully developed intercultural communication. However, as we are dealing with students of English, we have assumed that they must have had an initial interest and inclination to be more accepting of cultural differences.

The Intercultural Communication and Translation course aims to teach students to accept cultural diversity in different environments and work with people of various backgrounds. With this in mind, one of the assignments given to students is to write an essay of approximately 3500 words on a range of topics dealing with intercultural phenomena. They are instructed to describe an intercultural phenomenon within a specific context, i.e. to compare and contrast the observed phenomenon in relation to different cultural or social groups, and to provide real-life examples or illustrations thereof as given in news, literature, film, music, or other media. These phenomena must be adequately related to theoretical knowledge of intercultural phenomena. The essay should reflect the author's attitude toward the described issue. The expected

outcome is to find evidence of a change of attitudes resulting from a developed intercultural sensitivity and awareness.

1.2. Aims of the paper

The aims of this paper are to establish whether the fourth-year students have acquired important intercultural notions and developed awareness of the importance of intercultural sensitivity for successful communication and if so, to what degree. If not, or if the degree of intercultural sensitivity is inadequate, the second research question examines what can be done to remedy such learning outcomes.

Assessing the students' intercultural awareness and sensitivity is a twofold diagnostic process: first, at the micro level, assessing the effectiveness of the specifically designed course, and secondly, at the macro level, establishing whether students have developed intercultural awareness and sensitivity at the end of their academic studies overall. The data informs program administrators and course professors whether changes should be made to achieve better outcomes at both levels. A continuous re-examination of the qualities of learning outcomes and revision of teaching practices, including syllabi and curricular changes, are of utmost importance when quality assurance is one of the institutional goals and not merely a compliance with externally imposed standards (Wattles & Đorđević 2012:148).

2. Methodology

The research was done through the content analysis of two consecutive cohorts' essays (2017/2018 and 2018/2019), totaling 33 essays. Following qualitative research methods and procedures, the contents of the essays were coded³, then categorized into three categories, two of which were derived in the process of deductive categorization, while the third category was added through inductive categorization (Patton 2002). Sections three and four of this paper describe, explain, and discuss the obtained data.

3. Results

During the coding process the authors looked for verbalizations of theoretical concepts and indications of their (mis)understanding, and real-life examples of cross-cultural phenomena linked to expressions of (non-)acceptance, (in)tolerance, understanding or the lack thereof, aggression, mistrust, etc. The amount and strength of such verbalizations testify to the presence or absence of students' intercultural sensitivity and allow for generalizations about that sensitivity.

One such generalization is the evident lack of personal attitude expression. Most papers were mere recounts of theoretical concepts, testifying only to the adequate choice of topics to be covered. The essays mostly cited examples found in

³ For the purpose of coding the authors have used verbalizations of theoretical concepts as key descriptors, as well as expressions of objective description, tolerance, acceptance, aggression, intolerance, misunderstanding, and misconception, etc.

the given literature; very few examples were found as products of additional research or personal experiences. Where expressions of personal attitudes and opinions were present, these could be classified into two anticipated categories:

- presence of intercultural awareness
- lack of intercultural awareness.

However, some examples allowed for the emergence of the third category:

- false intercultural awareness

where although the verbalizations indicated the presence of intercultural sensitivity, the overall propositions actually represented a lack of understanding, tolerance, and acceptance of cultural differences.

1. Intercultural sensitivity

Within this category, five subcategories emerged depending on the focal point of the students' expressions.

1. Subcategory 'Acknowledgement of cultural diversity'

This subcategory represents students' acknowledgment that otherness exists—an acknowledgement of cultural diversity. The words and expressions illustrative of this category include lists of different ethnic groups or other cultures and subcultures, specific or non-specific: *different values, accept and understand differences, different communication and confrontation styles, cultural differences in body language*, etc., as shown in Textbox 1.

Textbox 1. Subcategory 'Acknowledgement of cultural diversity'

S3 *[people have] different moral and ethical values;*
S11 *The way we communicate with others depends on the culture that we belong to;*
S5 *There are many examples where one gesture of expression means something positive and benign in one culture and something outrageous and vulgar in other cultures; it is very important to never forget that different cultures value different things.*
S12 *by being aware of one's own culture and target culture, you are able to understand why people are acting as they are and how one might best respond;*
S12 *Confidentiality was represented here through two different cultural levels. [...] It was an intercultural misunderstanding. [...]*
In their culture the punctuation is very strict, but in our culture, two or three minutes don't make a large difference. This is of course only to be understood if someone is already familiar with German daily life.
S14 *Neither of these things mean that something is necessarily 'right' nor 'wrong', it just means that it's different;*
S15 *In order to avoid misunderstanding, people should be aware of the existence of different communication and confrontation styles and respect them.*
S16 *the cultural differences in body language are vast.*

This subcategory represents one of the basic levels of developing intercultural awareness: an understanding that otherness is a fact. It demonstrates an acknowledgement of diversity. The idea that different cultures have different values is repeated many times in various forms. The student-participants used more examples of personal experiences

for this subcategory than for the others: this shows that they read and understood the theory, but that they also experienced or witnessed cultural differences first-hand.

2. Subcategory 'Communication functions globally'

Within this subcategory expressions such as: *world-wide, globalization, related cultures, multicultural societies, world without borders, intercultural exchange, know the other culture well, harmonious relationships*, etc., served as diagnostic codes which could be classified as a student's awareness and understanding that appropriate cross-cultural communication leads to fruitful relationships between different cultures worldwide, as can be seen in Textbox 2.

Textbox 2. Subcategory 'Communication functions globally'

S1 *to function well world-wide; keeping harmonious relations with others*
 S2 *[due to globalization] many countries have become highly related to each other*
 S3 *world without borders in multicultural societies the need for understanding is perhaps greater than ever;*
 S4 *people from different countries do business and in this intercultural exchange it is essential to know the other culture well*
 S5 *the world is connected today like never before*
 S6 *as the world is becoming increasingly globalized*

Although the student-participants of this research live in a conflicting reality of transitional Serbia (Radosavljević and Jovović 2017:231), they are aware of the possibilities and benefits of worldwide communication. These young people were born into a globalized world with highly developed technology; however, they need to be directed toward actively engaging in global communication beyond academic contexts.

3. Subcategory 'Stereotyping is harmful'

Students' expressions concerning stereotypes and their harmful effect on appropriate communication can be found within this subcategory: *generalization, stereotypes, dark side, insulting, negative connotation, negative charge, distortion*, etc. as illustrated in Textbox 3.

Textbox 3. Subcategory 'Stereotyping is harmful'

S3 *[another] stumbling block would be stereotyping*
 S8 *Unraveling the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde relationship between these two terms is the first step to understanding why generalizations cross to the 'dark side' to become stereotypes; building stereotypes is not being clever but rather rigid and 'short-sighted'; they are a recipe for insulting people; have a negative connotation; force of the stereotype always has a negative charge*
 S8 *[generalizations] should be handled with care and caution; they are intercultural obstacles; they create a barrier between people who are trying to communicate.*
 S9 *[stereotypes] distort the facts; negative effects of stereotypes are justification of prejudice or ignorance*

Once having accepted that differences exist, students here demonstrate the awareness that along with differences come stereotypes, which pose a threat to adequate cross-cultural communication. This subcategory therefore represents a somewhat higher level of development of intercultural awareness and sensitivity.

4. Subcategory 'Intercultural communication is demanding'

This subcategory focuses on the difficulty of functioning cross-culturally in a sensitive and accepting manner. Some words and expressions that signaled this category were: *obstacles, traps, against instincts, fear, handle with care, barrier*, etc., in relation to intercultural phenomena. The students seem to understand the need for sensitive intercultural communication; however, they express difficulty with such communication, as illustrated in Textbox 4.

Textbox 4. Subcategory 'Sensitive intercultural communication is demanding'

S3 intercultural communication is a road full of obstacles and hidden traps; it goes against basic human instincts; [historically] there was conflict whenever there was a close encounter between different cultures; deep mistrust; fear of the unknown;

S7 We know that cultural differences can be barriers to communication

S8 [generalizations] should be handled with care and caution; they are hard to get rid of; they are intercultural obstacles; they create a barrier between people who are trying to communicate.

S12 intercultural communication is a challenge and constant learning; good intercultural communication requires a willingness to accept differences and try to understand and adapt them;

S12 ...our German coworkers were visibly shocked and appalled. They didn't appreciate the custom of drinking coffee at work... We were caught up with their face expressions and didn't quite understand their worry. Apparently, cultural misunderstanding caused offence on both sides.

S13 Translating culture-specific items is not easy at all; a good translator will have to make a lot of research in order to transmit the message of the SL text into TL text

S15 Since every culture is more or less different, it is likely that misunderstanding or confusion will arise in communication

The student-participants demonstrated awareness that effective intercultural communication requires conscious effort. Some even gave account of personal experiences when cultural differences had to be recognized and explained before effective communication was established.

The authors find that such expressions signal highly developed intercultural awareness, not only by demonstrating declarative knowledge, but also a realization that successful cross-cultural communication possibly requires more effort than the mechanics of language.

5. Subcategory 'Insensitivity to cultural differences in communication is harmful'

This category illustrates the students' realization that without sufficient tolerance and acceptance, cross-cultural communication can be detrimental. Words and expressions that signaled this type of thinking included: *harmful effect, bloodsheds, war, genocide, dangerous, failure* etc., as can be found in Textbox 5.

Textbox 5. Subcategory 'Insensitivity to cultural differences in communication is harmful'

S3 *The harmful effect of lack of communication between different nations; bloodsheds, war, genocide [are consequences]; [not communicating sensitively with others] would not only prove to be counter-productive but extremely dangerous*

S4 *if we don't behave respectfully towards the culture of the country, we may fail to end the business deal successfully*

S12 *If someone doesn't understand this, it can easily cause an offence or confusion between two very different cultures.*

S14 *It is also important nowadays to be culturally intelligent and aware of the world around you, so that you don't offend someone for not knowing how to show respect in another culture...*

S14 *Cultural awareness is important in business meetings. Before meetings, we should be aware of the differences between two countries and try to build a bridge so that both parties have benefits from one another.*

S16 *people can offend others without meaning to due to their cultural differences in nonverbal communication*

Similar to the previous subcategory, this one speaks of a higher level of intercultural sensitivity and awareness. Its absence, even if unintentional, may cause misunderstandings, which in turn may lead to unwanted consequences from failure to close a business deal to armed conflicts. Achieving this realization might motivate students to learn about, understand, and develop intercultural sensitivity, and in turn develop and nurture their tolerance, acceptance, and diversity, and enable finely tuned intercultural communication.

2. Lack of intercultural sensitivity

This category is comprised of students' expressions which exhibit a lack of intercultural sensitivity. Two subcategories emerged.

2.1. Subcategory 'Assumption of similarity'

As if in contradiction to the subcategory 'Acknowledgement of cultural diversity', in some of the essays the idea that *we (i.e. people) are all the same, we all want the same things*, is repeatedly expressed. This applies even in the case of non-verbal communication, as shown in Textbox 6.

Text box 6. Subcategory 'assumption of similarity'

S3 *I believe that we all want the same things*

S9 *The very common reason for the emergence of stereotypes is the existence of a group of people who have the same characteristics.*

S11 *facial expressions are the same for almost all people on the world; nonverbal communication is universal; if you do not know something, everybody would understand if you just shrug your shoulders*

The idea that 'we are all the same' is much more comforting and less demanding than trying to understand and adapt to cultural differences. This in turn leads to

ethnocentrism and interpretation of cultural differences, which is not obvious in the above examples.

2.2. Subcategory 'ethnocentric positions'

In a number of essays we find examples of ethnocentric positions such as Defense: perceiving one's own culture as being 'under attack' from other cultures, e.g. '*demonization of Serbs*', or stereotyping based on nationality, ethnicity, or regionality, as illustrated in Textbox 7.

Text box 7. Subcategory 'Ethnocentric positions'

S9 Serbs are attributed to various types of negative traits; demonization of Serbs is easy to do if; the defense of Serb national interests is always characterized as a commitment to the so-called "Great Serbia"

S14 In the Vojvodina region of Serbia, we have many different types of culture from different group of people... For the people in Vojvodina it is also said that they are much politer and talkative but poised. slow paced life, while people in Belgrade and other parts of Serbia 'down the river' seem to be always in a hurry or live a fast paced life.

S14 Americans are often times not ignorant but oblivious to learn something about other nations, they like for other nations to adapt to them and their 'easy going' attitude. Chinese have a high sense of honor in the work they choose to do in their lifetime, and they devote their lives literally to their work. This is who they are and this is what defines them.

The examples in both subcategories show an ethnocentric perception and/or interpretation of cultural differences. In the first subcategory, students push aside cultural differences in favor of the 'people are people' idea, which alleviates the discomfort of dealing with the unknown. Cultural diversity is ignored or minimized. In the Defense stage of DMIS, people are aware of cultural differences, but they feel threatened by them. Stereotyping is another way people in Defense experience cultural differences, which is understandable as it makes dealing with diversity less demanding. In this stage, the world is organized into "us and them", and one's own culture is usually perceived as superior to other cultures.

Given the prevailing political and social climate of present-day Serbia, which is almost fully antonymous with multiculturalism (Radosavljević et al. 2013:154-155), it should come as no surprise that a number of essays display an absence of intercultural awareness and/or sensitivity. The need for the students to expand their horizons and develop intercultural sensitivity is therefore greater than ever.

3. False intercultural sensitivity

This category emerged post-analysis, when it became evident that while some of the students' essays showed an understanding of concepts and theories of intercultural communication, their personal attitudes betrayed their understanding and acceptance of cultural differences.

Text box 9. Category 'False intercultural sensitivity'

S3 *[conflict between different cultures [is] inevitable] but through communication we can control it, manage it, and make sure it does not spill out of control.*

S7 *Individualism is described as care of individual only for himself and his closest family, it indicates weak interpersonal connection. Opposite to that is Collectivism where the priority of the society is loyalty to the group and defending their interests.*

S14 *...as people, we are all one and the same, but choose force to diversify and extract ourselves from that unity*

S14 *Cultural self-awareness is there to show us how to better treat people from other countries because of their cultural diversity*

The students express false intercultural sensitivity by stating that similarity and homogeneity of humans in general are only natural, while diversity is intentional and artificial, and therefore likely to produce conflict. Those who claim diversity are therefore the instigators. S7's comment illustrates the common misconception of assigning positive or negative values to categories such as individualism or collectivism, which were specifically designed to be non-value oriented (Bennet 1998: 53).

4. Overall summary of results

The examination of the essays showed an alarmingly low amount of text stating personal attitudes and examples other than the ones from the textbooks, with a blatant copy-paste practice from the sources. Of 33 essays collected, statements of personal attitudes were isolated in 16. 96 total statements were distributed in categories as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of personal attitudes statements

Student	Category 1 (+)	Category 2 (-)	Category 3 (+/-)
1	6	-	-
2	1	-	-
3	17	1	1
4	6	-	-
5	7	-	-
6	1	-	-
7	1	-	2
8	20	-	-
9	5	2	-
10	2	-	-
11	0	5	0
12	6		
13	1		
14	3	2	2
15	3		
16	2		
total	81 (85%)	10 (10%)	5 (5%)

The majority of the personal attitudes (85%) fall in the “presence of intercultural awareness”. A lack of intercultural sensitivity was detected in 10% of personal attitude statements, and only 5% of statements indicated a false intercultural awareness. Such a distribution demonstrates that when students express their personal attitudes toward intercultural phenomena, they are more likely to be positive than negative.

4. Discussion

4.1. Intercultural awareness and sensitivity: theory vs. students’ beliefs

It should be noted that the student-participants live in a highly polarized Serbian society, where cultural diversity is, more often than not, promoted as a part of the political agenda but in reality ignored or even actively suppressed (cf. Ratković 2017). Despite this, those who have expressed their personal attitudes and related their experiences agree on several key points: that we live in a globalized world and should learn how to deal with cultures different from our own; that effective intercultural communication is not easy to achieve and that it takes conscious effort; that the absence or lack of intercultural awareness and sensitivity may lead to misunderstandings, confusion and conflicts; and that different cultures have different values, which does not make them “better” or “worse” than any other. Most importantly, these essays highlight the importance of developing intercultural awareness and sensitivity in order to understand and accept cultural differences and improve communication.-

As expected, most students draw perceptual cultural boundaries in accordance with national political boundaries (cf. Bennet 1998: 52) and thus compare Serbian culture to other national or ethnic cultures. Cultural differences are more easily perceived from this vantage point than any other, as this is the type of comparison most students are likely to have experienced directly while traveling abroad, meeting foreign visitors to Serbia, or indirectly, while watching films or reading. While there is nothing wrong with comparing national or ethnic cultures, we must be careful to use neutral categories of cultural comparison, such as high/low context cultures (Hall 1991), or individualism/collectivism (Bennet 1998). Students should be reminded that drawing comparisons between national/ethnic cultures may easily degenerate into ethnocentric-oriented debates on which culture is better, or an impassioned defense of one’s own cultural values.

Given their age, experience and the political and social environment, it is understandable that most students would predominantly experience cultural differences from the ethnocentric viewpoint, and thus display a lack of intercultural sensitivity. One of the most common misconceptions is that effective communication between different cultures is easy to achieve simply because of biological similarities we share as human beings. The fact that people share the same basic requirements of food, shelter, security, etc., should not be taken as evidence that ‘we all want the same things.’ It is in the ways of adapting to these common biological and social needs—

and the values and attitudes assigned to them—that cultural differences emerge. “The biological commonalities are not much help when it comes to communication, where we need to exchange ideas and information, find ways to live and work together, or just make the kind of impression we want to make” (Barna 1998: 236).

Cultural differences are readily observable in non-verbal communication, as evidenced in numerous textbooks, articles and online videos which illustrate the often awkward or humorous situations arising from the misinterpretation of gestures or other non-verbal signals. No cross-cultural studies have shown evidence of a universal non-verbal language, except for facial expressions for certain universal emotions (e.g. happiness, anger, fear, sadness). However, we should not forget that the circumstances in which an individual will display these universal emotions via facial expressions are culture-bound (Barna 1998: 236). Verbal communication, accompanied by non-verbal communication such as body language, spacing and touching, gestures, eye contact, voice, etc., is common among all cultures. In low-context cultures, non-verbal communication modifies the verbal message, while in high-context cultures it can supplant the verbal message (Bennet 1998). Certainly, the idea that ‘we are all the same’ is much more comforting and less demanding than trying to understand and adapt to cultural differences. The example of the United States as a ‘Melting Pot’ illustrates how much easier it is to expect everyone to conform to one cultural pattern than to recognize and acknowledge cultural diversity. However, the assumption of similarity often reveals an ethnocentric perception and interpretation of cultural differences.

The third category, ‘False intercultural sensitivity’ can be related to the Minimization stage in the DMIS framework, where cultural differences are neutralized by subsuming them into an all-encompassing category of ‘human nature’. This stage is often characterized by the expression of sentiments such as ‘we are all the same’, ‘we all want the same things’, ‘people are people’, or an appeal to ‘universal values’ that apply equally well in all cultures. As Bennet (1998:93) remarks, research has shown that the Minimization stage represents a transition state between the earlier ethnocentric and the later ethnorelative stages. In this view, it makes sense that the students would be in a transition state between their ethnocentric perception of cultural differences and their developing intercultural awareness. Still, the experience of Minimization is ethnocentric in its assumption that all people are essentially similar in ways that actually correspond to one’s own cultural patterns.

On the other hand, the Minimization stage also includes the ability to perceive and accept some cultural differences and to recognize the “essential humanness of others”, as well as the need for acceptance and tolerance of different worldviews (cf. S14’s comment). It is therefore vital to encourage the students to think critically and raise their awareness of their own cultural values and attitudes. Only then can they be expected to recognize that there are other ways to organize reality and that these other ways are no less valid than those of their own culture.

4.2. Implications for course and curriculum planning

An inadequate number of students have developed intercultural awareness and sensitivity (less than 50%). Those who have are mostly at the initial stages of the development. Therefore, suggestions for changes both in the micro-context of university courses and the overall curriculum are necessary. The question remaining is what the best formal, institutionally based approaches to promote this type of knowledge with our students are.

Courses such as the one in question must be mandatory. Also, other courses must introduce more of this subject matter into their syllabi. Most English program courses could allow such changes quite naturally and easily. Here are some suggestions:

- provide illustrations of successful communication, and more importantly, illustrations of failed communication due to a lack of intercultural sensitivity. Examples might be taken from history directly, historical novels, or even fictional literature and the film industry;
- introduce examples of diversity and non-value-oriented otherness to students at every possible opportunity; migrations are a great example of how differences become apparent and how cross-cultural communication becomes an issue;
- encourage students to become aware of broad stereotyping and recognize cultural diversity of various kinds: age, gender, sexual orientation, profession, etc.;
- actively engage students in cross-cultural problem-solving, which can be designed for this purpose, or base examples on the existing ones that would require suppling other possible scenarios in communication which would produce more fruitful outcomes;
- facilitate frequent classroom debates, along with research necessary to prepare for debates and discussions;
- expose students to multimedia content and not only to textbooks and ex-cathedra lecturing about the matter;
- expose students to different spoken English varieties and insist on not assigning any values to different accents;
- enable active, focused and critical reading and listening in formal or informal online research.

As far as the overall curriculum is concerned, evidently courses such as Intercultural Communication and Translation are necessary. The following suggestions might be beneficial for the development of intercultural awareness among students:

- define intercultural awareness and sensitivity as a major institutional goal
- introduce (additional) digital literacy courses so this invaluable resource for worldwide communication and research is used adequately and wisely;
- introduce courses with intercultural phenomena as appropriate (teaching, translation, pragmatics, etc.);
- direct students to gain personal intercultural experiences, i.e. voluntary

- work teaching English to various marginalized groups or incorporating such community service in curricula;
- introduce courses which teach students how to use online teaching methodologies, tools, and platforms;

These are only a few options that can contribute to this pressing matter when it comes to producing learning outcomes that would allow the students to become successful and accepted citizens of the world.

5. Conclusion

Given the circumstances in which Serbian youth live today, it is not surprising to have obtained the described data. Higher education institutions must provide such environments for students that would facilitate not only academic but also personal growth. If students' previous levels of education promote plagiarism and minimal effort practices, this must be remedied at universities. Developing critical thinking and personal attitude expressions are not easy tasks, but they remain some of the most prominent responsibilities of higher education.

When intercultural communication is concerned, it is evident that Serbian students must be exposed to otherness in a much greater capacity. This might be possible with adequate technology and knowledge about how to use it, or otherwise through direct contact with other cultures through travel.

Focusing on the education side of this coin, university syllabi must ensure that students are exposed to different cultures and learn about them extensively, stressing acceptance and changing misconceptions about otherness in the widest possible sense. English programs offer numerous courses that allow for such matter to be dealt with, and the curricula should accommodate for changes if this matter has not been so far included in the program.

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INTERKULTURNA SVEST U STUDENTSKIM ESEJIMA U KONTEKSTU KURIKULUMA STUDIJA ENGLESKOG JEZIKA

Rezime

Cilj ovog rada je da utvrdi da li su studenti četvrte godine studija Engleskog jezika stekli interkulturalnu svest koja je neophodan predušlov za uspešnu komunikaciju, i ako jesu do koje mere. U istraživanju je pregledano ukupno 33 eseja koje su studenti dve generacije pisali kao deo završnog ispita na predmetu Interkulturna komunikacija i prevodjenje. Analizom sadržaja, utvrdilo se da je tek 50% studenata izrazilo svoj stav ili iznelo samostalne primere. Verbalizacije stavova studenata klasifikovane su u tri kategorije: prisustvo interkulturalne svesti, odsustvo interkulturalne svesti i lažna interkulturalna svest. Na osnovu uvida u broj i kvalitet studentskih iskaza, utvrđeno je da je, ukupno gledano, interkulturalna svest nedovoljno razvijena, i da je neophodno interkulturalne sadržaje uvrstiti u predmete gde je to moguće, i predložene su izmene za kurikulume studija engleskog jezika.

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