Instructor : Mr BOUNADJA Semester: 2

Level : First Year / Master degree

Module : ICC

Course : One / Culture and Communication in Intercultural Studies

*Course Description: It begins with an introduction, then moves on* *Sensation seeking,*

*Intercultural communication competence (ICC), Sensation seeking and ICC, and finishes with* *Knowledge of English and ICC.*

*Course objectives*

By the end of this course, the students will be able to know how to depend on their knowledge of own culture and degree of similarity with a target culture so as to develop intercultural communication.

*Course content*

Culture and Communication in Intercultural Studies

Introduction

Intercultural communicative competence includes knowledge, skills and attitudes at the interface between several cultural areas including the students’ own values and worldviews and those of a target language country. Consequently, the development of intercultural communicative competence involves the students’ experiences from their own cultural backgrounds allowing them to reflect on their individual cultural assumptions as an integral part of further development of their skills and knowledge of the world. Linguists and methodologists started to consider it as a major facet of language instruction only recently. Foreign language teaching methods stress on enabling learners to become successful communicators. They are expected to master both the linguistic code they need and maintain proper relationships with their interlocutors.

It is a challenge for language teachers and learners alike. The difficulty strongly felt in the countries where the experience of intercultural communication is fairly new. The challenge is to investigate the role of extra-linguistic, mainly culture-specific factors, in the process. The learners’ mother culture can either be a facilitator or a barrier having positive or negative function as underlying determinants of the learners’ knowledge, skills and attitudes, depends on the degree of similarity between the cultures involved in communication. The closer the relationship is between a mother culture and a target culture, of a speech community whose language is to study, the more successful the foreign language teaching/learning process is.

Intercultural communicative sensitivity as a component of intercultural communicative competence is a major determinant affecting all the other components as it encourages the understanding of what other people need, and being helpful and kind to them. Its development lies in the learners’ experience of a target culture by means of either a formal exposure during language courses when it is taught together with a foreign language, or by means of intercultural communication in courses specifically designed for this purpose. Besides, non-institutionalized means are possible in the course of informal interpersonal contacts with foreigners on various types of occasions.

In fact, English has the status of a modern *lingua franca*, an international means of communication, which has become de-nationalized as each speaker uses it filtered through his/her own cultural experience. So, the ultimate goal in the process of foreign-language learning should be to become an intercultural mediator, a person who has mastered both linguistic competence and intercultural communicative competence and is able to go beyond boundaries thanks to the ability to recognize, negotiate and transfer cultural property and symbolic value.

One of the reasons why people need to become intercultural communicators is that they experience cultural differences on a daily basis as the proximity is greater between cultures. Globalization as the main factor has made a change between the nations whose languages, cultures and worldviews have differed significantly make contact now. It has become a basic truth today. The statement that intercultural communication is ‘a must’ is paramount in a world full of differences. People tend to co-operate with each other and act as partners in various fields although geographically speaking some might remain hundreds of miles away due to political and socio-economic changes. More people cross their own borders and become global students, tourists, employees, etc.

Thus, participants in intercultural encounters are challenged by various opportunities for cultural misunderstanding. This phenomenon is tightly linked to their success or failure in the process of communication. Today more than ever before, the biggest difficulty lies in the manner they deal with the culture-specific differences they face. Most often they do not lack linguistic skills, but still fail to achieve their communication goals. Most communication failures are the result of a low level of intercultural communicative competence or even a lack of it.

In postmodern reality marked with cultural diversity, linguistic competence is no longer a sufficient prerequisite of a communication success since communication has to be understood as more than a mere exchange of information and sending of messages. As noted by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin and Don Jackson (1968) it consists of two mutually complementary levels: a factual one which is an information exchange and an interpersonal one which serves to create relationships between speakers. Culture differences has an impact on both cases. First, communication success depends upon the receiver’s understanding of the speaker’s message in another cultural context, then how he tries to interpret it during the decoding phase. Second, it entails culture-specific expectations about the type of interpersonal relations proper to a given communication act.

1.Sensation seeking

Sensation seeking is a personality variable associated with adventure and a thirst for novelty (Everett & Palmgreen, 1995; Zuckerman, 1983, 1994). High sensation seekers enjoy physiologically stimulating experiences and the intense emotions associated with such experiences. Sensation seekers are predisposed to more socially acceptable forms contact with people from other cultures, as revealed in recent research. They look for opportunities to communicate with culturally different other individuals. This may explain why some people are more likely to volunteer at international student services on university campuses or sign up for study abroad programs as compared to others. Yet, it is not clear whether once they find these opportunities they are able to communicate effectively and appropriately.

2. Intercultural communication competence (ICC)

There appears to be a consensus among researchers that ICC has to do with effectiveness (ability to accomplish one’s goals) and appropriateness (to exhibit expected and accepted behaviour in context) in intercultural situations (Arasaratnam, 2007; Bradford, Allen, & Beisser, 2000; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). In recent research, Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) developed a model of ICC based on the premise that ICC should be studied from the perspective of the “other” (as opposed to self-reported perceptions of one’s own ICC), incorporating multiple cultural perspectives. An inductive approach was followed to reach five variables related to ICC, based on the participants’ responses. They revealed one of the few models of ICC which incorporates multiple cultural perspectives (Arasaratnam, 2006). The model identifies experience, listening skills, positive attitudes toward people from other cultures, motivation to interact with people from other cultures, and ability to empathize (engage in cognitive and emotional role-taking behavior) as variables contributing to ICC.

Empathy not only contributes to positive attitudes toward others, but in turn helps to being perceived as a competent intercultural communicator. In other words, the five variables identified in the model interact to produce a result which is ICC (as perceived by the “other”). Researchers have developed an instrument that translates well into multiple cultural contexts presents unique challenges to the researcher to explore the relationship between ICC and sensation seeking.

3. Sensation seeking and ICC

Arasaratnam’s (2006) model of ICC shows a relationship between intercultural experience, motivation to interact with people from other cultures, and positive attitudes toward people from other cultures, all leading to ICC. High sensation seekers are predisposed to attitudes and behaviours that are favourable for intercultural communication. A positive attitude towards people from other cultures is fostered because they represent a form of novelty. High sensation seekers’ affinity for new experiences is the driving force behind their motivation to communicate with people from other cultures as well as their favourable attitude toward such people. An experience in intercultural communication leads to positive attitudes toward people of other cultures, which leads to motivation to communicate with people from other cultures, which in turn leads to more experience in ICC.

Based on this, it can be reasoned that more experience in communicating with people from other cultures develops intercultural communicative competence. High sensation seekers are not only predisposed to seeking intercultural contact, but also equipped to exhibit ICC. The relationship between sensation seeking and ICC reveals that sensation seekers achieve better intercultural communication competence.

4. Knowledge of English and ICC

English has inevitably become part of people’s lives in many fields today. English teaching and learning is likely to be ineffective in producing perfect language users. For instance, Prapphal’s study (2001) reveals that the English ability status of Thai graduates reveals that the English ability status of Thai graduates is ranked eighth among ASEAN member countries, according to the CU-TEP (Chulalongkorn University Test of English Proficiency). Additionally, Wiriyachitra (2002) emphasizes that the lack of effective English skills of Thais communicating in the workplace, particularly in the Thai tourism field, tends to give foreigners a negative attitude towards Thailand.

Thais often lack English language speaking and listening in the classroom. According to Simpson (2011), English teaching in Thailand concentrates on grammar and accuracy and teachers primarily deliver English lessons using the Thai language; therefore, students are not sufficiently exposed to practicing speaking and listening skills. Other factors contributing to unsuccessful English teaching and learning in Thailand is pointed by Mackenzie (2002) who found that being too shy to speak English, being demotivated to communicate in English, worrying too much about accuracy, and relying on rote memorization are characteristics of Thai learners that result in ineffective English language learning.

New English programs with the increased employment of native English teachers applying several teaching approaches such as communicative language teaching (CLT) or student centeredness were adopted to improve Thai English learners. Hence, these were unsuccessful as adopting communicative language teaching (CLT) approach was considered inappropriate attitude in Thai cultures of unquestioning and obeying the senior people (Wangkijichinda, 2011). Student centeredness did not fit their culture since Thai English teachers were often the center of the classroom and acted as knowledge providers for obedient listeners and knowledge receivers. Consequently, English skills development was far of being a priority to promote English communication success in intercultural contexts, other skills and knowledge such as intercultural communicative competence.

*References*

*The internet.*

*Discussion questions*

*To become an intercultural communicator depends not only on teachers and learners, but on the similarities between the learners’ own culture and target culture. They often seek opportunities to communicate with individuals from other cultures in order to more socially be acceptable as these are volunteer at informal forms of learning.*

*What positive attitudes should individuals of each culture have towards the opposite ones so as to develop motivation and lead to more experience in ICC?*

*Linguistic competence does necessarily imply full communication when every community members share attitudes of citizenship towards their counterparts. Where has this been experienced in today’s modern societies if we take into consideration historical ties, differences in language background and shift in moral trends?*