

THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER - A KEY FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRANSNATIONAL CAREER

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Abstract: *The career building in many fields, from the initial training and up to the professional development, takes place more frequently in different cultural and linguistic areas. A condition of this mobility is the individual's ability to respond appropriately and effectively to the challenges of a different cultural and linguistic context. A starting point is usually the relationship between the culture of origin and the foreign culture. This contribution focuses on the foreign language teacher as a cross-cultural mediator, as a cross-cultural competent person who with his/her knowledge can form cross-cultural persons both for everyday and professional life.*

Keywords: *intercultural education, foreign languages, career development, professional profile of foreign language teacher.*

1. The school and the intercultural education

Education has a double role: the complex formation of the individual according to a theoretical approach, which is determined by social-economic and political factors, and the training of some competences that are specific to each school subject.

Certainly the social-political context has the most powerful influence on the approach to education, on the development, selection and spreading of concepts that govern an educational system at a particular time. The present society is no exception to this. In general terms the challenges of this society are caused by the massive mobility of people and by the information and communication technology that want to transform a planet, whose entire history until half a century ago was characterized by geographical and territorial-administrative delimitation, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious division, racial, social and political

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separation, into a human settlement common to all the people, where these distinctions and differences should be reduced.

Since the 1980s school can be considered one of the strongest areas of cultural interferences, where individuals of different ages and with different motivations and aspirations learn to live together, to accept differences, and all these things under the professional direction of the teachers. "*Culture in school equally means the culture of the others and their own culture*", says Abdallah Pretceille¹, and Hall² emphasizes the importance of the awareness of cultural models "*both in their manifest and latent forms*". The cultural encounter requires joint action, dialogue and mutual understanding.

The intercultural perspective with an impact on education dates back to the 18th century when Johann Gottfried Herder argued that each culture has its own value, by encouraging knowing "*peoples' voices*" in their diversity and recognising the difficulty to understand what is foreign. The way from this image of multiculturalism, very real in fact, up to the modern concept and its implications in education is very crooked. The starting point is the premodern multiculturalism when the contact with a different cultural and linguistic context was limited to enclaves and occasional encounters, while the relation principle worked on the friend – enemy dichotomy. A long period of time – from the great geographical discoveries and up to the beginning of the 20th century – the way of multiculturalism is marked by signs that signal the presence of homogeneity, assimilation, marginalization, human devaluation, extermination. Diversity becomes the main cause of conflicts, the individual swings between the fascination for everything that is foreign and the rejection of everything that is different, between the inside of a community which defines his identity and where he finds himself by ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural fixed values and the outside of a community which is in total disagreement with his own image of reality. The national language and the national consciousness guarantee national unity, and school is an important institution in maintaining the national unification and homogeneity. Minority languages, regional languages and even dialects are subject to a repressive movement of assimilation. The second half of the 20th century brings a new form of multiculturalism; the

¹ Abdallah-Pretceille, *Vers une pédagogie interculturelle*. Paris: INRP, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1986.

² Hall, E. T., *The Silent Language*. New York, 1979.

distance between cultures and forms of existence is replaced by nearness and the monolingualism by multilingualism. The communication situations can no longer be subordinated to the contrasting models – inside-outside, friend-enemy –, the stranger and the strange context requiring a resetting in perception, a new definition: *“Der Fremde ist uns nah, insofern wir Gleichheiten nationaler oder sozialer, berufsmäßiger oder allgemein-menschlicher Art zwischen ihnen und uns fühlen; er ist uns fern, insofern diese Gleichheiten über ihn und uns hinausreichen und uns beide nur verbinden, weil sie sehr viele verbinden“*. (Bauman, 1996:13) The stranger is no longer somewhere far away, untouchable, *“die Fremdheit ist in uns selbst”*³. Under the daily confrontation with diversity and difference has been developed the idea of intercultural education as a gateway to this complex world of interferences and permissive borders, of cultural fields, whose elements are transmitted from a generation to another and propagated by diffusion between different cultural groups.

Intercultural education brings to the fore the subjective and relational dimensions, the joint action and the dialogue, focusing on the individual experience and the individual personality as a whole. By considering these dimensions the attention focused on aspects such as promoting mutual understanding, respect for others even if they are different, degradation of stereotypes and prejudices, decentration, tolerance for ambiguity, integrative adaptation, maintaining the independence of the self, negotiation of values and behaviour codes, the intercultural dialogue.

Intercultural education aims at training an individual who can manifest both the desire of self-knowledge and that of knowing the other, even if his external image differs from his own. **The key factor** in the organization and functioning of school, from the intercultural perspective, **is represented** by the individual, exactly **by the teacher**, *“who sanctifies the place”*. The school reform, in terms of multiculturalism and plurilingualism, that first and foremost involve the assimilation and practice of new behaviours, attitudes and values, can be carried out only with the help of the teachers.

2. Foreign language teaching and learning – a fundamental process in the intercultural education

In 1967 Robert Lado⁴ demanded *as a main goal for teaching and learning foreign languages the acquisition of communicative and language competences*

³ Kristeva, Julia, *Fremde sind wir uns selbst*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2001.

⁴ *Moderner Sprachunterricht*, München: Hueber.

and of the ability to use the learned foreign language in the target culture(s). Neither the audio-lingual method nor the communicative-pragmatic approach, which dominated the process of teaching and learning foreign languages in the 1970s and even in the 1980s, has this goal, they continued to set the focus on the linguistic aspects and on the speech acts, that were considered as cross-cultural Universals in the use of a foreign language. We should not forget that by *"the intercultural communicative competence we make the difference between the user of a foreign language and the monolingual native speaker"* (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2000:51).

The concept of interculturality refers in the foreign language didactics, first and foremost, to the specific teaching and learning situation which by definition is an encounter between one's own culture (culture of origin) and a target/ foreign culture. The transmitter and the receiver, who belong to different cultures, have, as Niklas Luhmann says, *"a specific semantic code"* (1980:19), that is reflected in the ways of expression and of interpretation. Julia Kristeva uses, in close relationship to this aspect, the concept of *"idéologème"*, which expresses the degree of dependence on one's own cultural matrix. This approach can also be transferred in the process of teaching/learning foreign languages, where intercultural means inherent and foreign values, comparison, contrast, change of perspective.

Michael Byram describes the competences of an intercultural speaker as follows: *"the intercultural speaker needs multilingual competence, sensitivity to the identities present in interlingual and cross-frontier interaction, ability to mediate/relate one's own and other cultures with intercultural communicative competence"* (1999:18), and in the teaching/learning foreign languages these three components are essential because the intercultural interaction can be managed only by using them.

We may say that a person/learner by acquiring the thought, action and assessment models of the target culture develops an additional process of socialization. From this perspective, the foreign language learning implies a cleavage of the individual consciousness between a mental model that exists before the contact with the target culture and a mental model that has been enriched by incorporating the new knowledge. The transition from the inherent to the target culture is often marked by severe stress because it requires a separation, a dislocation from a familiar cultural matrix which is constitutive to the individual's cultural belonging and identity. To overcome this obstacle it is necessary to acquire an intercultural competence that in teaching/learning foreign

languages can be realized by some goals which are distributed progressively on more levels, namely:

- level 1: the perception of the inherent culture, but without inducing a process of reflection on it, the awareness of belonging to a particular cultural context and of the cultural differences between the individuals;
- level 2: the differentiation of prejudices, the review of the self-stereotypes, that implies an affective dimension in the process of comprehension of the target culture;
- level 3: the comprehension of the behaviour which is specific for the target culture and this also implies a social-pragmatic dimension.

The main goal of the didactics of the foreign language as a fundamental science in the teachers training is the development of a theoretical and practical frame which enables teachers to teach foreign language and target culture efficiently and appropriately. From the perspective of the intercultural approach the didactics of foreign languages focus on two aspects: plurilingualism and intercultural communicative competence. In respect of the training of intercultural competence, various teaching strategies have been already developed. In an extended frame these strategies can be put together the following way⁵:

1. *cross-lingual comparative teaching strategies* whereby, in a conscious way, are carried out comparisons between different cultural and linguistic contexts; in this way both the learner's mother tongue and his/her own culture are included in the language teaching/learning process;
2. *explicit and analytical cognitive strategies* whereby the teaching will focuses on the sociolinguistic and cultural awareness in relation to the target language and culture;
3. *experiential strategies* that require a greater convergence to authenticity.

In view of the goals of foreign language teaching/learning, together with the expansion of the research in the area of the curriculum, there have been set some limits between linguistic, cultural and literary objectives by making a differentiation between the cognitive, affective, social and pragmatic dimension of these objectives. Thus, under the

⁵ See also: Stern, H. H., *Issues and Options in Language Teaching*. Oxford: OUP, 1992; House, J., *Zum Erwerb interkultureller Kompetenz im Unterricht des Deutschen als Fremdsprache*. www.zif.spz.tu-dramstadt.de, 1994.

influence of behaviourist theories, since the middle of the last century and up to the early '80s, linguistic objectives were dominant. The linguistic skills, embodied in the form of linguistic behaviour in the target language, are in the focus of foreign language teaching/learning. The communicative (pragmatic) approach doesn't produce a removal of the objectives, but the new perspective led to a rediscovery and a reassessment of the literary and especially of the cultural objectives. The reconfiguration of the existing objectives, especially under the pressure of the social context, has led to a new objective: the interculturality, that involves an integration of the four dimensions mentioned above⁶.

Interculturality, which updates cultural and literary objectives, is put into practice through the **intercultural communicative competence**. Initially, the idea of interculturality meant, in fact, knowledge of the past and present of the target cultural context, a simple identification of the similarities and differences between the target cultural space and this of origin, in other words it meant a superficial knowledge of the cultural and spiritual life of the foreign context. Without stimulating reflection and comprehension, the whole action focuses on what is generally named "cultural studies". But "*sowohl das Kulturwissen als auch die Beschäftigung mit der Literatur sind in dem Fremdsprachenunterricht keine Zwecke an sich selbst, sondern sie sollen zum Verständnis der ‚Wirklichkeit‘, der Denk- und Handlungsmuster, der Normen und Werte der Zielkultur beitragen*" (Krumm, 2003:119). By learning foreign languages people acquire the intercultural action competence, "*in dem Sinne der Fähigkeit, die eigenen sozialen Lebenserfahrungen mit denjenigen der Fremden zu verbinden*" (The Ministry of Culture, 1993:53, art. 53, apud. Krumm, 2003:119).

Interculturality entails the development of some other secondary objectives which contribute, as a matter of fact, to the accomplishment of the central objective of the present process of teaching and learning foreign languages.. These secondary objectives are:

- plurilingualism - the challenge of learning several foreign languages (at the receptive and productive level), but using the same time units, a fact that imposes an accurate expression of this objective, starting with the knowledge in a foreign language which already exist;
- intercultural learning - learning by linguistic and cultural experience;

⁶ A se vedea: Byram, M. / Morgan, C. et al. (1994); Bausch, K. R. et al. (1998); Bredella, L. / Delanoy, W. (1999).

- autonomous learning – the ability of lifelong learning of foreign language(s);
- transdisciplinarity – the integration of several school subjects that require the intercultural dimension
- linguistic specialization in different fields of activity (language for special purposes) – the possibility of using the foreign language not only in school but also in training and/ or job.

3. The professional profile of the foreign language teacher

Linguistic diversity, European dimension, intercultural competence, plurilingualism and the use of the foreign language in any communicative context are essential elements that must be taken into account in planning a study programme whose objective is the initial training of foreign language teachers.

Two of the above mentioned elements are complementary and these are **the European dimension** and **intercultural competence**. Any language spoken in the European space represents this continent and contributes to establishing its identity. This is the reason why the recognition of the value of each language is necessary and another reason for this is its contribution to establishing the concept of a united Europe. To accomplish this we need to redefine the process of foreign language teachers' training in such a way to stimulate the plurilingual and multicultural awareness. For this approach an essential condition is the acquiring of the intercultural competence, which involves:

- the capacity of communication in at least two foreign languages;
- the perception and comprehension of the target context;
- empathy, tolerance, decentration, relativization;
- the reflection on the own culture and mother tongue;
- the capacity of establishing relationships between the foreign language that is being studied, mother tongue and other known foreign languages..

Since the centre of attention moved on communicative skills, in the second half of the latest century, the scientific interest in the behaviour of foreign language teachers during their teaching activity has also increased⁷. After observing the interactive forms in the foreign language

⁷ See: Freudenstein, R.: 1976, 1982, 2000; Lado, R.: 1964; Schröder, K.: 2001; Ziebell, B.: 2002; Meyer, H.: 2007.

classes, whose results led to detailed analyses, it was possible to create a professional profile of what is called a good teacher of foreign language. Which would be the features of such a teacher? Gertrude Moskowitz⁸ answered this question highlighting a few elements which are still relevant today, when the main objective of teaching/learning foreign languages at the end of the 20th century becomes the **intercultural communicative competence**. Thus, a good teacher of foreign languages:

- is a person who has a good command of the foreign language he/she teaches;
- while teaching he/she uses mainly the target language;
- he/she has in mind the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing since they all contribute to acquiring the communicative competence in that foreign language;
- is a person, who, during the class, talks less than the students stimulating their free expression;
- his/her didactic approach is varied and thus, richer;
- he/she creates a relaxed learning environment by practising a sociolinguistic style;
- he/she reacts promptly, but with tact, to students' mistakes.

These features are correspondent, in Reinhold Freudenstein's opinion (2002), with the following three fields:

1. knowledge of the taught foreign language and its use in the didactic process;
2. methodology and didactic;
3. social behaviour,

Fields which should take an important place in the economy of the initial training programme of foreign language teachers.

Hans Jürgen Krumm (1993) uses, for the foreign language teacher, in a strong relationship with the professional training, the metaphoric term of "*transnational person*", initially referring to the persons, who, due to the new European economic and political context based on a relaxation of the labour market, have become "*commuters*" between different cultural contexts by daily crossing geographical boundaries. Meanwhile this phenomenon has enlarged by being present in the school environment

⁸ Moskowitz, G., *Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class*. Rowley: Newbury House Publishing, 1978.

and in the communication systems which use modern technology. The **foreign language teacher** can be considered a **transnational person**, not an occasional one but a **professional person** who, through the basic knowledge specific to his/her field of activity and through intercultural competences, he/she can dispose of, is able to create other transnational persons competent both in everyday life and for the professional environment.

Irrespective of the place where the didactic activity takes place, and by this I mean both the formal school system and the informal ways of learning foreign languages (foreign languages schools, public universities, cultural institutes) whose targets are different ages and levels, starting with kindergarten, then going through all the school periods and levels and finishing with in-training and on-going preparation and development of adults, the foreign language teacher must dispose of some general and some specific competences, which should correspond to standards established in accordance with the requirements of the present social life and of the labour market.

Under the new European and world conditions, the quality standard of foreign language teaching and learning and obviously, the one of training foreign language teachers must take into consideration the following characteristics:

- **communicative competence;** having in mind the fact that approximately 60% of Europeans acquire their knowledge of foreign languages in school, this must prepare them to be able to cope with any situation of communication in their daily or professional life; the processes of communication are becoming more and more complex, a fact which determines a certain progression in the process of teaching/ learning foreign languages since they have to correspond to the levels of knowledge and competence established in *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (The European Council 2000); in this way a continuous and visible process in learning is ensured and also, the long-term interest for learning foreign languages is stimulated;

- **interaction;** interaction is represented by putting the forms of communication into practice; in order to acquire capacities of interacting in a foreign language, the forms of interaction which are specific to each target language and are marked by the target culture must constitute the object of the process of teaching foreign languages; in most cases only the specific forms of interaction and those imposed by the didactic process are

used; the introduction of concrete forms of interaction in the didactic process would make their contextualization in the formal school institution possible, a fact that would lead to the application of interactional procedures which can influence, in a positive way, students' attention, perception and cognitive approach;

- **interculturality**; undoubtedly, the optimum use of an interactional process with participants from different cultural and linguistic contexts cannot be reduced only to one use, more or less correct, of the foreign language, according to the communication situation, but it supposes a reference to the target culture; the accomplishment of this objective depends on what is called the intercultural communicative competence, a competence which must include at least two foreign languages and certain emotional and behavioural availability; although this may mean a greater effort on the part of the student, it can be compensated by the lifelong learning;

- **focusing the didactic process on the student**; when teaching foreign languages and other subjects, this means a high degree of independence in the learning process, independence which also involves a certain relationship with linguistic and cultural individual experiences as a result of socializing, of the direct contact between members of other linguistic and cultural environments and of personal preoccupation, outside the school, with the target language; in this way the capacity of reflection and linguistic and socio-cultural awareness is developed when it comes to learning a foreign language.

A central role, in this case, is played by the foreign language teacher's professional capacity and quality. "*The competent teacher*" is characterised not only by having very good knowledge of the subject he/she teaches, but also by possessing a certain psychology of learning and of the didactics of teaching foreign languages. He/She must prove a certain sense of observation, imagination, creativity, tact, distributive attention, exactingness usually found in a structure of pedagogical aptitudes represented by the: cognitive, organizational and communicative field (see Iucu 2004). Quality can also mean diverse contents, a high standard in the command of the foreign language and grammatical correctness. In other words, the initial training of foreign language teachers must achieve superior qualitative objectives.

Learners must be prepared **to use the foreign language** not only in the classroom, but also **in any communicative situation in real life**. To achieve this the foreign language teacher must detach himself of those pre-

established patterns that lead to an artificial working climate and he/she must also use, in his didactic activity, everyday situations which the students are able to recognise as part of their real life and, most importantly, to achieve the transfer between certain communicative situations that they have to deal with. In accordance with this the teacher develops two new important functions: that of advisor for the student and that of an intermediating factor of the didactic activity which is centered on the student who, in this way, gets higher autonomy in learning.

A professionalizing of teachers, generally, according to the constructivist approach of plurality, should take into account the three interdependent and equal aspects which correspond to the threedimensional image of classical models of didactic competence (Klime et al. 2003). Starting with this idea Cristina Allemann- Ghionda together with Christiane Perregaux and Claire de Goumoens (1999) developed, within the frame of a research project, a model based on three fields, a model which has led, among others, to the development of a curriculum for training teachers who teach in multicultural and plurilingual contexts. In the authors' view the foreign language teacher must dispose of specialized knowledge and certain competences to be able to teach interculturally and to form the intercultural communicative competence in students of a foreign language.

basic knowledge	specific to the target cultural context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • culture and civilization • interaction and communication
	comparative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perception of cultural similarities and differences
	general (transcultural)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • culture as an orientation system • intercultural communication • mechanisms of forming prejudices, stereotypes, clichés • the functioning of alteration
	of communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • linguistic competence in the target language • speech acts • intercultural communicative competence • metacommunication

competence	emotional-behavioural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • empathy • tolerance • acceptance • cooperation • reflection • relativization • decentration
	pragmatic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • handling communicative situations • analysing conflicts • solving problems

Table 1: The basic knowledge and competences that a foreign language teacher must dispose of for an intercultural teaching

Conclusions

At the beginning of the new millennium, the European Union had as a goal that it became the most dynamic economic environment in the world, having the most powerful competitive system, in a society based on science. The achievement of these goals has major implications mainly at the educational level. Society, in the way that is wanted for the entire European community, needs well trained individuals. Their formation pre-supposes the existence of some school institutions which from an organizational, human, and technical point of view are able to achieve the objectives and quality standards required by the European Union. The optimum functioning of school organizations depends on an educational system whose politics must take into account three central aspects: **quality, access and availability**. The circle closes with state politics through which people can see how well every state understands that education is a fundamental investment in ensuring a good functioning of society.

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