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INTERLANGUAGE COMMUNICATION AS A CHALLENGE FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SCHOOLS

1. INTRODUCTION

In this presentation I will concentrate on some aspects that have to do with the cultural component in language teaching in schools. I will limit my discussion to general education, which in Finland covers the comprehensive school and the senior secondary school. The presentation is necessarily sketchy and subjective, since so little serious research and thinking has been devoted to the topic so far.

In the 25 hundred years of foreign language teaching, it appears that periods of functional and formalistic approaches have alternated. There have been periods when the pragmatic goal of communication has dominated, and periods when the main goal of the study of foreign languages has been to contribute to the education of the cultural elite, with more emphasis on knowing the forms of the language and some of its classical literature. Until fairly recently, the study and analysis of literary texts formed an important part of modern language teaching in England and on the continent. The more advanced section of the International Baccalaureate still contains this kind of task.

The cultural component entered the syllabuses of modern languages as a clearly defined specific objective largely thanks to the Council of Europe language projects. Two conferences in 1965 recommended that the four skills should be taught and it should also be sought to impart to the pupils knowledge about the people(s) whose language is studied, about their culture and to foster a positive attitude to-wards the speakers of the language. The recommendations of the Council of Europe have since been a major premise in syllabus planning here in Finland. In the mid-70's we added as an objective that pupils should also be able to tell about their own country. At the same point of time, we stressed the educative value of foreign language learning and its contribution to international understanding and to education for peace.

However, I believe that our statements, and similar statements have later been made in other countries, have tended to remain more at the level of rhetoric rather than been implemented in teaching. The main problem is undoubtedly the fact that

we simply have not had a sufficient knowledge base to guide us in the production of teaching materials, in the training of teachers and in the evaluation of learning outcomes. One problem has to do with textbook production: publishers are wary of publishing anything innovative, because such books are risks (teachers may not choose such books but stick to the old and tried).

It is a common observation among teachers that the educational objectives in the syllabuses are, in fact, important, commendable and challenging, but it is far from clear in what ways they could be achieved: with what content and with what methods? In brief, I believe that we simply do not know very well how to teach for intercultural communication.

2. CURRENT ORIENTATION IN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SCHOOLS

The general trend in the postwar period has been a movement towards a more functional teaching of modern languages in schools. This trend has been obvious in syllabus work. From a strongly grammatical syllabus, everywhere there has been a shift towards a more communicative syllabus, which means that the ability to use the language to fulfil communicative needs is the starting point and the forms of language are seen as means of realizing people's commu-nicative intentions. Here in Finland, we were among the first in the world to introduce such communicatively oriented syllabuses on a nationwide basis.

In spite of explicit warnings, which I among others issued during the period when we were working on the syllabuses, many teachers have interpreted the new syllabuses as legitimating a limited touristicoriented pragmatic approach to teaching. Similarly, there seems to have been little serious thought given to the nature of communicative language learning and the methodology of communica-tive language teaching. My impression is that most teachers think that when the content of teaching is more communicatively oriented, most of the job is done.

3. WHAT DOES EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNI-CATION CONSIST OF?

It is my impression that it is mainly outside of the formal school system that there has been raised the question of what factors determine effective intercultural communication. This question con-fronted me personally with growing urgency in 1985, when together with a colleague I was drafting a largescale project that was

designed to study the needs of foreign languages in the Finnish economy. We planned eight subprojects, and one of them was designed to address the following questions: What does language competence consist of? What is the role of FL skills in a person's overall professional competence? What is the role of linguistic competence and what is the contribution of various forms of cultural knowledge?

So far, we have carried out largescale studies foreign language needs in industry, in wholesale and department stores, among the employees of the City of Helsinki, among the employees of smaller rural municipalities, and in the Ministry of the Interior. A colleague, Dr. Kaarina Yli-Renko, has recently completed a questionnaire study, in which 109 English-speakers living in Finland were asked to express their views of Finns as communicators in English.

Smith (1987, 3-4) suggests that there are five 'senses' needed for effective communication across cultural boundaries:

1) a sense of self: understanding one's cultural environment is the basis of; 2) the sense of the other: "the more we know and understand someone, the greater our chances are for effective communication ... we are better able to cope with misunderstandings and correct them more easily"; 3) the sense of relationship between self and other: the degree of distance affects the amount of formality in interaction; 4) sense of the setting and/or social situation: expectations of different ways and functions of communicative behavior in different occasions; 5) sense of the goal or objective to be accomplished: "the objective may be very specific (e.g. to borrow money or refuse to loan money) or more general (e.g. to make a good impression ..), but it must be kept in mind if we are going to achieve it. There are often multiple goals..., and sometimes conflicting ones... Important general goals and objectives are commonly at a subconscious state of awareness and require effort to verbalize".

Tentatively, we could suggest that in order to cope successfully in a contact with foreigners in which their language is the means of communication, we need at least three knowledge systems: 1) knowledge of the subject matter being addressed; 2) knowledge of language code; and 3) knowledge of the foreigners' culture and cultural expectations. Later on I will say more about the third point.

4. FROM ETHNOCENTRISM TO ETHNORELATIVITY

4.1. Some empirical findings

Byrnes (1986) suggests that it is probably no mere coincidence that the strong awareness of the social biases of language has originated in the English-speaking world (Wittgenstein's later philosophical work on language games in Cambridge, Hymes' work on the ethnography of speaking, Austin's and Searle's work on speech acts, Grice's work on conversational maxims, Brown and Levinson's work on politeness in language, etc.). The emphasis on audience consideration is also seen in the literature on writing (eg. Flower & Hayes: writer-based writing, reader-based writing; the problem of 'inconsiderate texts' that do not take into account the problems that readers have).

Byrnes suggests that the Americans tend to believe that the speaker and writer bear the responsibility for successful communication, not the hearer or reader. By contrast, for the German situation, the burden of interpreting the speaker's meaning is said to be on the receiver.

Byrnes quotes some earlier studies that showed, using a small corpus, that German speakers used "upgraders" more often in complaints and requests than English speakers (absolutely, terribly; entsetzlich, furchtbar). English speakers preferred "downgraders" (sort of, what have you). Thus it can be expected that Germans would be judged as being more impolite in making requests and more aggressive in making complaints.

Byrnes (1986, 203) notes that:

German students see American students as superficial, uninformed, uncommitted, uninterested conversational partners who are always willing to put on a friendly face, but whose knowledge of subject matter, be it in politics or educational issues, in philosophy or religion, in contemporary affairs or history, is sadly lacking, resulting in their unwillingness or perhaps their inability to take a stand.

Americans see German students as smart but opinionated, perhaps even pigheaded, involved and engaged in causes, who forcefully debate an issue which might have multiple shadings and perhaps no clear answers by resorting to facile right/wrong dichotomies; they put other person on the defensive, even humiliate them in front of the group, with a concomitant self-aggrandizement.

Kotthoff (1988) also suggests, after analyzing spoken argumentative dialogues, that Germans showed a more offensive argumentative style than the Americans. Galtung (1981, 1983) has made a similar point.

It is difficult to say how representative such findings are, but there can be little doubt about the fact that foreigners tend to be regarded with suspicion and sometimes even with hostility.

Nancy Mitford's character Uncle Matthews, modeled after her own father (Lord Redesdale) is a classic example. He says that "Frogs are slightly better than Huns or Wops, but abroad is unutterably bloody and foreigners are fiends.". (Frog= Frenchman, Hun= German, Wop= Italian). This is ethnocentrism carried to an extreme, chauvinism.

4.2. Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is usually taken to the assumption that the world view of one's own culture is central to all reality. Bennett (1986, 31), in fact, suggests that difficulties in learning the concepts of inter-cultural communication are nearly always attributable to a disavowal of cultural difference, not to a lack of appreciating similarity. Bennett (1986, 27-69) has presented an interesting and comprehensive developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. It shows the pro-gression from ethnocentricity to ethnorelativism. Schematically, the stages are as follows:

THE ETHNOCENTRIC STATES AND THEIR STAGES

I. DENIAL
A. Isolation
B. Separation

II. DEFENSE
A. Denigration (negative stereotyping)
B. Superiority (cultural pride)
C. Reversal

III. MINIMIZATION
A. Physical Universalism
B. Transcendent Universalism

THE ETHNORELATIVE STATES AND THEIR STAGES

IV. ACCEPTANCE
A. Behavioral Relativism
B. Value Relativism

V. ADAPTATION
A. Empathy
B. Pluralism

VI. INTEGRATION
A. Contextual Evaluation
B. Constructive Marginality

In the same spirit as Bennett, Saltzman (1986, 247-248) states that some people living in sustained relationships with those from a different culture may gradually add elements of that second culture to their perceptions, awareness, emotions, and behavior. They may expand their cultural selves to become "150% persons". Such per-sons find value in, and have positive sentiments towards both cultures. They are effective in interactions with people of both cultures. Such an individual is invariably called a "multicultural man" (Adler, 1977), a "mediating person" (Borchner, 1979); such a person is said to have reached "maturity" (Heath, 1977), and acquired "intercultural competence" (Dinges, 1983; Brislin, 1983).

5. BEYOND COMMUNICATIVE EFFECTIVENESS — EDUCATIVE VALUE OF FL LEARNING?

Most textbook writers and teachers seem to adhere to the view that cultural knowledge consists of the way people behave, their artefacts and their institutions.

Information about these is scattered in the textbooks, usually without any attempt to explain the overall context or compare and contrast the situations in the home country and the target language country. I have sometimes called this the "MacDonald's approach to culture studies" to highlight the superficiality of the approach (concentrating on externally obvious perceptual differences). The choice of the name is no comment on the wellknown fast-food chain.

I believe that we can usefully go beyond this rather limited approach to culture studies if we follow the ideas of people like Clifford Geertz. Geertz (1975, 89) has

suggested that culture is 'an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in a symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life'.

At least in terms of language teaching, this seems a more useful approach than the earlier emphasis on people's behavior patterns, their artefacts and the social institutions. Geertz (1975, 5) strongly emphasizes the role of language and other semiotic systems as the carriers of culture:

The concept of culture I espouse ... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.

I believe that with the Geertzian concept foreign language study can be seen to possess valuable educative potential. This suggestion has been made at several points of time. Among the most eloquent are Thomas Henry Huxley and George Herbert Mead.

Huxley (in his treatise on education from 1882) naturally emphasized science as the Principal Subject, but after the "essential" scientific studies he advocated "not more science but one, or if possible, two languages". He was convinced that "the knowledge of some other language than one's own is, in fact, of singular intellectual value". Aside from "the practical value of such knowledge" ... "one of the safest ways of delivering yourself from the bondage of words is to know how ideas look in words to which you are not accustomed" (Quoted in Louis Foley, "The Huxley Tradition of Language Study", MLJ, 26(1), 1942, 14- 20).

Mead, a leading pragmatist in social psychology, suggested that:

A person learns a new language and, as we say, gets a new soul. He puts himself into the attitude of those that make use of that language. He cannot read its literature, cannot converse with those that belong to that community without taking on its peculiar attitudes.

He becomes in that sense a different individual. You cannot convey a language as a pure abstraction: you inevitably in some degree convey also the life that lies behind it. And this result builds itself into a relationship with the organized

attitudes of the individual who gets this language and inevitably brings about a readjustment of views. George Herbert Mead. (1946). Mind, self and society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 283.

With some time lag, such notions have found their way into L2 syllabuses and L2 didactic literature. Byram (1989, 9) quotes the following passage from a document that Her Majesty's Inspectorate issued in 1985:

Foreign language study expands the linguistic area of experience by affording interesting linguistic comparisons. It also offers insights into another culture and as such is concerned with the human and social area of experience.

Throughout the course pupils can be encouraged to view the familiar from a different angle, not least in terms of people's behaviour, and thereby widen horizons and break down feelings of insularity.

6. CULTURE IN FL LEARNING — A MODEL

In business and diplomacy, courses in cultural orientation have been arranged for quite some time. Paige (1986, 2) defines cross-cultural orientations as those intercultural programs that are designed to prepare specific groups of learners to reside in specific target cultures for specific purposes. This includes reentry into their own culture after sojourning abroad. One of the objectives of such courses is to avoid or at least mitigate the effects of culture shock.

Cultural orientation has not been very seriously discussed in L2 research and development work. However, in a recent book on "Cultural studies in foreign language education" Byram (1989, 136-146) presents a model of foreign language education, which is based on his review of related literature, his own teaching experiences and his research on the subject. The model has four interrelated components: language learning, language awareness, cultural awareness and cultural experience.

Byram (1989, 147) also presents a plan of how the four components could be weighted over a five-year course (approximately 120 hours per year).

Year	Language learning	Language awareness	Cultural awareness	Cultural experience
1	60%	20%	10%	10%
2	50%	15%	15%	20%
3	50%	15%	15%	20%
4	20%	20%	20%	40%
5	20%	20%	20%	40%

I think that Byram's model is worthy of serious inspection and it can suggest some ways of enhancing attention to crosscultural communication in L2 teaching in our country.

7. A SKETCH OF TEACHING CULTURAL AWARENESS OF AMERICA

In the following I have attempted to present a tentative sketch of American's values and orientation to life. It is based on literature (eg., Hoopes & Ventura, 1979; Seelye, 1971/1988; Stewart, 1971) and on personal observations based on an extended sojourn in America.

1. **Relationship with nature**: how to utilize, exploit and control nature.

2. **Time**: efficient use of time very important; time is money; "I don't want to waste your time (on)...

3. **Outlook on life**: generally optimistic, which means that problems related to nature, economy and society can be solved with the aid of science, technology and good management.

4. **Success in life**: highly dependent on a person's own wish to succeed and on the active utilization of opportunities or even creating the openings.

5. **Co-operation**: even if ability to co-operate (to be a good member of a team) is highly appreciated and rewarded, this does not mean that open competition for jobs, etc would not be considered natural and necessary.

6. **Societal forces**: the entire American society is characterized by strong dynamism, informality and the openness to anything new. People are typically encouraged to try to fulfil their ideas (You should do that!), rather than discouraged by suggesting all kinds of possible difficulties with the project.

7. **Children's education**: young school children are trained to present ideas and "share" their hobbies (sharing time).

8. **Youth culture**: very powerful youth culture with lots of money involved; young people define what is "in", not the older generation; it is up to the older generation to try to keep up; "senior citizens" (vanhukset).

9. **Family structure**: usually only the nuclear family; grandparents can live thousands of miles away, seeing their grandchildren often only at Thanksgiving; older people often move to the South, especially Florida.

10. **Mobility**: Families move often; there is only a weak sense of regional affiliation, sense of place of birth.

11. **Church and religion**: play an important role; active and visible because do not receive public support.

12. **Politics**: a lot more conservative than Finland; "Liberal" is sometimes, or fairly often, used as a derogatory term.

13. **Centralization**: very decentralized, with state and local control of many societal functions; many officials and board members are elected, not appointed as in Finland. There is, however, some talk about the need of 'national standards', for instance, in education.

14. **Balance of power**: the role of the Supreme Court is extremely important, almost impossible for Finns to even begin to appreciate; the same is true of jurisdiction in general (cf. legal series on TV); lobbying and strong lobbies in Washington D.C. Even teachers and educational researchers etc have their lobbies in Washington, D.C.

15. **Sport**: highly visible, with big money involved; basketball, football etc teams are very important in high schools and universities; athletic success can decide how generous the alumni are during fundraising appeals. "World series" (!) in baseball.

16. **Philosophy**: usually pragmatic. Large and ambitious theories are avoided as suspect and as too speculative. Facts and empirical data are very important. "How would you test/measure/demonstrate/go about to ...? Ideas, theories need to be testable and tested.

17. Social Interaction: generally straightforward and informal. A person is expected to actively look after his/her own interest and not wait for the "system" to do things right for you. You should complain and demand restitution. "You must be a little pushy!"

18. Norms of politeness: usually you are expected to "overstate" your appreciation. (I just love being here. It's great being here: the people are wonderful, etc. etc. What a delicious meal!)

Obviously, one has to be careful in not claiming absolute truth for such statements, but in more modest interpretation they can serve as a useful starting point for crosscultural comparisons that go beyond the "MacDonald's approach". With increased awareness of "what actually makes Americans, Germans, etc tick", communication might be substantially improved, as communication has justifiably been defined in general as the "creation of common meaning" (Bennett, 1986, 52).

8. CONCLUSION

To conclude, I believe that, at least as far as language teaching here in Finland is concerned, we are at a stage where we are only trying to get a grasp of the nature of the problem or challenge that is facing us.

I believe this assessment is justified, in spite of the fact that the teaching of German has traditionally paid at least some attention to 'Kulturkunde'. This has hardly been very systematic or very well thought out. Fortunately, there is a growing body of literature on the theme of crosscultural communication (eg. Nishida & Gudykunst, 1981; Kim & Gudykunst, 1988; Purves, 1988; Yli-Renko, 1988). This conference is another sign of current interest in intercultural topics.

After we have reached a better understanding of the situation, we will be in a position to develop and try out some new curricular approaches and develop related teaching procedures. This is a major task but it promises to bring new vitality to language teaching and learning, and may also have some promise of making language learning both more effective and more motivating.

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