

**TILTM 2020****Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication****CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN TEACHING THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES**

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***Abstract***

The article examines cross-cultural communication skills as the main component of foreign-language professional competence. It explains the advantages and benefits of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology that foster additive bilingualism. Those who learn the Italian language for special purposes are often professionals or future professionals in a wide variety of fields who need to develop their cross-cultural communication skills and to get a knowledge of national and cultural characteristics of the countries of the studied language, because many interaction business failures has been ascribed to a lack of cross-cultural competence on the part of business practitioners. The teaching of cross-cultural communication should involve authentic materials to increase the students' motivation, to expand the knowledge of the socio-cultural context of business communication, to enhance students' communication skills, to make them more proficient in the subject matter, to close the knowing-doing gap, and to make their communication more effective in real-life situations.

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**Keywords:** Authentic materials, business communication, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), intercultural communication, Italian language.



## **1. Introduction**

The global process, as well as the related social and economic changes, make it necessary to find new approaches for professional training. The new communication requires that the global society has a strong cultural component, whether it is searching for software, capturing foreign markets, integrating in the host country, negotiating with foreign partners, or managing an international company.

At the same time, the demand for foreign languages seems increasingly differentiated and specialized in a sectoral sense, and it depends on the needs of learners. There is a growing demand for business Italian, especially in those sectors of the economy where enterprises are located outside Italy. In general, teaching and learning of foreign language for business communication offers the possibility of a better understanding of one's own culture from the perspective of cultural relativism and creates favourable conditions for understanding (Byram, 1997).

## **2. Problem Statement**

This article covers linguistic and pragmatic issues: the development of intercultural communication skills as a key component of foreign-language professional competence. The correct understanding and acceptance of cultural differences is an important competitive advantage in an interdependent economy, so much so that research into cross-cultural communication and cross-cultural management has become increasingly important as revealed by Usunier and Lee (2005).

Cross-cultural management means "the crossroads of cultures"; cross-cultural communications play a special role in its development and successful functioning. In our opinion, one understands cross-cultural communications as the interaction among representatives of different cultures, which implies both direct contacts between people, primarily in a foreign language, and indirect forms of communication. So, cross-cultural competence depends on the quality of the communicators' performance of this process in the cross-cultural field (Usunier & Lee, 2005).

## **3. Research Questions**

This study focuses on some aspects of cross-cultural communication skills in Italian language teaching for professional purposes.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The study aims to analyze the main methods of teaching intercultural communication skills, such as the application of authentic materials and the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach in business language teaching.

## **5. Research Methods**

We applied the following approaches used in pedagogic research to find the solution:

- study and analysis of specific literature published in Russia and Europe;

- generalization of experience in teaching Italian language for professional and business communication in the Italian educational environment.

A considerable number of Russian and European linguists (N.D. Galskova, N.I. Gez, T.A.Dmitrenko, E.I. Passov, S.G. Ter-Minasova, P. Balboni, F. Caon, R. Titone and others) is devoted to the study of problems of cross-cultural communication in foreign language education.

Thus, Galskova and Gez (2007) substantiate the principle of multiculturalism in foreign language education. The researchers of the cross-cultural communication, Dmitrenko (2018) and others, developed a theory and offered practical recommendations for foreign language teaching within the competency-based approach. They also understand the importance of teaching non-verbal means of cross-cultural communication in a foreign language based on online communications.

One cannot imagine the modern European concept of foreign-language education outside the dialogue of cultures. There are departments and faculties of cross-cultural communication in almost all Italian universities. According to the concept of Balboni and Caon (2015) (Ca' Foscari University of Venice), the "intercultural communicative competence is connected with the recognition of differences in habits, value systems, and many paralinguistic aspects that define the characteristics of persons as members of the national community" (pp. 25-26).

One of the basic educational principles of teaching foreign languages, as noted by Balboni (2015) "is the cultural context of the language. It is necessary to turn to culture to understand the language better" (p. 136).

While language learning inevitably involves an analysis of the context and circumstances that affect its correct use, effective communication in a foreign language depends on the speaker's ability to move away from his or her own culture, and to make his messages accepted and interpreted by a different system of values, beliefs, and habits (Genovesi-Bogićević, 2008; Hofstede, 2003).

Integration of cross-cultural communication teaching into the goals and objectives of language education means to encourage the personal growth of learners who can take effective communication steps in an intercultural context (Balboni, 2015; Cavaliere, 2016), where it is clear that the grammatically correct use of language is not in itself a guarantee of effective communication.

Those learners who have intercultural skills are "bilingual subjects" according to Titone's (1996) concept. They both understand and convey messages effectively, which helps them build relationships with their interlocutors.

The Content and Language Integrated Learning – CLIL is widely used in teaching the Italian language, and it is extremely popular in the language education system at various levels - from school to university. In the EU countries, the CLIL educational model has become a component of public education policy. According to Marsh (2013), one of the authors who developed the CLIL, the main purpose of this methodical model is to provide students with pragmatic subject and intercultural skills, which integrate the knowledge of language and its functionality.

The foreign scientific literature states that in the modern world learning a foreign language as a separate discipline becomes less relevant (Borghetti, 2018; Cavaliere, 2016; Marsh, 2013; Serragiotto, 2014). Foreign language knowledge, traditionally considered a sign of good education, has acquired a practical orientation with an emphasis on the interests and needs of students, when forming their bilingual

communicative competence in professional communication has become the goal of foreign language acquisition. It implies the use of a foreign language as a means and a tool in learning the non-language subjects and promotes greater authenticity in the learning process (D'Alessio et al., 2018).

Content and Language Integrated Learning accordingly provides for the simultaneous acquisition of subject matter knowledge and the ability to operate with that knowledge in a foreign language. This dual focus provides a balance between the two components, neither of which is superior to the other (Passov, 2000; Ter-Minasova, 2000). The goal of this training is to form a bilingual competence in the subject area (Ter-Minasova, 2000). Along with traditional learning materials, authentic materials are used whose content (linguistic and non-linguistic) is directly related to non-linguistic subjects such as management, marketing, business communication, intercultural communication, etc., which are necessary to develop the intercultural communicative skills, according to Serragiotto (2014).

## 6. Findings

Authentic material is especially important in special CLIL courses as well as in industry-specific scientific and professional courses, while in traditional language lessons its use is limited to acting as a supplement to the teaching aid.

The use of authentic materials is particularly important in the Italian educational environment. Many researchers and methodologists, in particular those who belong to the Venetian school, believe that specific assignments based on authentic materials encourage students to use a foreign language in various communicative situations connected to the professional context (Cavaliere, 2016) and allow them to work in parallel on professional vocabulary, language skills and intercultural communication competence (Serragiotto, 2014).

Thus, Bonvino and Faone (2016) emphasize that the material can be considered authentic if it is not intended for foreign learners, but is created for native speakers and not for teaching purposes.

At the same time, Vedovelli (2015) notes that the authentic materials have a strong "communication component", which corresponds to the fundamental recommendations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, focusing on the acquisition of linguistic and pragmatic communication skills as the basis for the development of a system of language proficiency levels.

According to Coonan (2012), using authentic materials and organizing specific related assignments that create an educational environment in which students use a foreign language in various communicative situations related to the professional context allows for parallel work on professional vocabulary, language skills and intercultural communication competence. Its base is the concept of knowledge of cultural differences that affect behavior in professional relations (Kramsch, 1998).

Ellis and Johnson (2005) define the authentic material as any material taken from real life, i.e., not specifically created for foreign language education. This category includes books and manuals, texts from newspapers, magazines and bulletins, various audiovisual materials, a large variety of materials used in business - brochures, catalogs, advertisements, video programs for internal use, business correspondence, memoranda, financial reports, diaries, contracts, codes of ethics, materials available for public use - travel booklets, maps, video programs, information brochures on the history and geography of the region, information on public transport, postal, banking and telephone services, bureaucratic language of

declarations (e.g. customs and tax), the items such as bus, train, theatre, cinema, concerts, museums tickets, video or audio recordings of specific events - lectures, seminars, presentations, meetings or company visits, etc.

These resources can be used in various ways and for different purposes: they are not only teaching material in a foreign language, but also help to create communicative situations in the classroom with a high degree of plausibility, which facilitates the use of role-playing techniques by stimulating communication skills. They are also a precious source of information for building a group project or for giving a presentation in a foreign language, for example, a web quest, a workshop, a workshop for business communications, etc. (Coonan, 2012). The teaching assignments that help students to develop progressively an intercultural communicative competence focus on the professional and language skills that are necessary to be able to function in a multicultural environment. They consist of two categories:

- Assignments that stimulate understanding and awareness of cultural diversity.
- Assignments that encourage usage of the knowledge acquired and the development of professional and communication skills.

Another activity useful for developing the knowledge about cultural differences is watching video programs about the target culture.

During any group project, one may inquire about non-verbal languages, such as proxemics - the concept of personal physical space, kinesics - body language (gesticulation, facial expressions, smiles, position of hands, legs, sweat, smells, sounds), vestemics - clothing in conformity with the communicative event, and the meaning of objects - the position conveyed by objects primarily symbolizes a social status (Balboni & Caon, 2015).

Students can describe the behavior they have noticed by comparing it with the behavioral norms of their own culture, and finally propose strategies for effective cross-cultural communication. Understanding the conventions associated with everyday verbal communication, such as greetings, explicit or tacit hierarchies, expressing gratitude, making and receiving compliments, body language, accepting or rejecting requests, suggestions, advice, requires much more from language learners than just being able to express themselves in grammatically correct sentences.

*A developed intercultural communication skill is the ability to say what is necessary, to know whom to talk to, and under what conditions. It cannot, therefore, be developed without understanding the basic values and beliefs conveyed by the various forms and uses of the foreign language in which the communication takes place. (Balboni & Caon 2015, p. 134)*

In the second category of activities aimed at stimulating the application of knowledge, which one has acquired, and at the development of communication skills, the teacher has the opportunity to include role-plays and simulation games.

In the globalization context, managers have to be prepared to create communication at two main levels:

- In the internal relations of the multinational groups within which they operate;
- In the external relations with the multinational teams of companies with which they have various types of relationships (cooperation, partnership, joint venture, competition, litigation, negotiation, etc.) (Ellis & Johnson, 2005; Serragiotto, 2014).

Some aspects of conversation, such as a sense of time, a tone of speech, a duration of the conversation, a knowledge and an observance of protocols, as well as some non-verbal ways of communication (kinesics, a meaning of objects, etc.), become part of different conversation styles and represent the authentic materials, so it can be easily didacticized and used in imitating and role-playing games.

## 7. Conclusion

Language teachers, using the authentic materials and CLIL methodology, can transmit and encourage students to assimilate the fundamental principles of intercultural communication and promote sensitiveness both to cultural differences such as the different aspects of etiquette, etc., and to more profound aspects of value systems. It helps them to combine properly the modern teaching methods in the classroom, including a discussion technology on current issues, audio, and video analysis as well as possible critical communication situations and "cultural incidents" (Balboni & Caon, 2015).

Through the practice-oriented exercises, role-playing, and/or simulation games, the learners have the opportunity to get some kind of feedback on the theory studied in the traditional phases of learning such as reading and understanding of special literature.

The content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach and the use of authentic materials help to create an ideal environment to use a foreign language as a communication tool. It helps also to develop intercultural skills and abilities in real situations. Providing an authentic foreign language educational environment promotes multilingualism in the academic setting.

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