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C U P R I N S

Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence through English Phraseological Units

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Abstract: *The article is devoted to the study of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). through phraseological units. Teaching foreign languages is an intercultural process. Developing intercultural communicative competence has become a central issue in teaching English as a foreign language. Four categories of tasks based on English phraseological units aimed at developing ICC have been developed, according to a modified Byram's model of ICC. They are: Knowledge of Culture, Attitudes towards Culture, Interpreting and Relating Culture, and Intercultural Interaction.*

Keywords: *intercultural communicative competence, phraseological units, language and culture, learning tasks.*

Rezumat: *Articolul este dedicat dezvoltării competenței de comunicare interculturală prin valorificarea unităților frazeologice engleze. Predarea limbilor străine este un proces intercultural. Dezvoltarea competenței de comunicare interculturală a devenit o problemă centrală în predarea limbii engleze ca limbă străină. Studiul nostru reflectă cele patru categorii de sarcini, elaborate după modelul lui Byram, care sunt îndreptate spre dezvoltarea acestei competențe la cursanți: cunoașterea culturii; atitudinea față de cultură; interpretarea culturii și relaționarea cu aceasta; interacțiunea interculturală.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *competența de comunicare interculturală, unități frazeologice, limbă și cultură, sarcini de învățare.*

The great interest of people in travelling has gradually transformed human society into a community in which intercultural communicative competence represents an important ability that helps people to interact appropriately in order to live harmoniously in a multicultural world. Today's world is characterized by mutual penetration, where people with different cultures increasingly travel and encounter each other. When people start an intercultural dialogue, they inevitably face communication barriers, such as cultural stereotypes, language deficiency, lack of interaction ability, prejudice etc. All these can be overcome with the help of *intercultural communicative competence* (henceforth ICC). Thus, we can say that ICC constitutes an important capacity for people that helps them live – and survive – in this rapidly changing world.

Developing ICC is one of the most challenging tasks in modern teaching. It tends to be particularly popular in foreign language teaching. While studying a foreign language, the students also study the culture of the people speaking it. One cannot master a language and its culture without acquiring ICC.

In order to understand intercultural communication, we should explain what *culture* and *communication* are. Anthropology defines culture as practices and products of a particular group of people. Thus we can conclude that culture reflects a human group's way of life, its customs and traditions, beliefs, ideas, art etc. Communication involves the sharing of information, ideas, and thoughts with other people.

Intercultural communicative competence is a broad term, and it cannot be developed through the study of language alone. We can definitely state that studying a foreign language is an excellent way towards understanding the relationship between language and culture. We may indeed highlight the relationship between language and culture through the following quotation: "Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways" [3, p. 3]. Teaching foreign languages is an intercultural process. Language is used in all spheres of human life and as far as language is culture, culture also covers all spheres of human life. When teaching a foreign language, the teachers introduce their students to another world, one culturally different from theirs. It is for this reason that foreign language teachers should create an atmosphere in their classes that will promote and develop the learners' intercultural communicative competence.

Developing intercultural communicative competence has become a central issue in teaching English as a foreign language. Today teachers understand that the main goal of language teaching is to be able to communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. However, they should not forget about grammatical and lexical competence. Grammatical forms and new vocabulary must not be ignored in language

teaching, if teachers wish to develop good intercultural communicative competence in their students.

The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Chapter 5.2) describes intercultural communicative competence or ICC as the main goal of foreign language learning. The document mentions that communicative competence has such components as linguistic competences, sociolinguistic competences, and pragmatic competences. As for linguistic competences, they include lexical competence, grammatical competence, semantic competence, phonological competence, orthographic competence, and orthoepic competence. Lexical competence is of particular interest for us, as we are going to discuss how to develop Intercultural Communicative Competence through English phraseological units.

According to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Chapter 5.2.1.1.) lexical competence is knowledge of the vocabulary of a language and the ability to use it. A vocabulary consists of lexical elements, which, in turn, include fixed expressions – strings of words that are studied and used as wholes, also known as phraseological units. They represent the embodiment of a nation's consciousness and culture, serving as a means of communication and knowledge of the world.

Phraseological units are colorful pieces of language and one of the means for people to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. They are studied by phraseology. "Phraseology is a branch of linguistics which studies different types of set expressions. If synonyms may be figuratively referred to as the tints and colours of the vocabulary, then phraseology is a kind of picture gallery, in which are collected bright and amusing sketches of the nation's customs, traditions, recollections of its past history, folk songs, fairy tales, quotations from the great poets, crude slang witticisms, etc. Phraseology is not only the most colourful, but probably the most democratic area of vocabulary and it draws its resources mostly from the very depths of popular speech" [2, p. 166].

There is no doubt that phraseological units represent an important part of language and culture. They give life and richness to the language. In the context of ICC, we can say that people with different cultural backgrounds interact with each other and sometimes use phraseological units in their speech. Therefore, developing ICC through English phraseological units becomes self-evident, since the English language is considered a lingua franca all over the world.

This study makes use of English phraseological units as a means to increase intercultural communicative competence in the learners. We are going to present a number of tasks based on English phraseological units. They help increase this competence in the students involved in their completion.

Both the teaching and the learning process include results with enormous educational potential. Good knowledge of phraseological units requires specially organized long work. During the lessons dedicated to the development of ICC through phraseological units it is reasonable to make use of the complex of tasks directed to the increasing the learners' ICC. The criteria applied for developing such tasks rest to a large degree on Byram's factors in intercultural communication [1, p. 34]. However, Byram's model of ICC is slightly modified in this study. Our version of Byram's factors in intercultural communication is as follows:

- *Knowledge*: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction [1, p. 51]. Here we have included knowledge about aspects of one's own and foreign culture, students' ability to discover new information about historical and contemporary issues concerning foreign and their own culture, the influence of cultural background on interaction.
- *Attitudes*: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own. Here we have included the ability to ask questions about the value of cultural products and practices, to explore other perspectives in interpreting familiar and unfamiliar phenomena.
- *Skills of interpreting and relating*: the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own [1, p. 52]. Here we have included the ability to identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and to critically analyze their origins, to identify areas of misunderstanding in an interaction and to explain them in terms of each culture, to relate cultural aspects of one's own culture to those of foreign cultures [1, p. 52].
- *Skills of intercultural interaction*: the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction [1, p. 52]. Here we have included the ability to interact with representatives of foreign cultures by using their knowledge, attitudes, and skills, to mediate between conflicting interpretations of situations.

After modifying Byram's model of ICC, we developed four categories of tasks based on English phraseological units, aimed at developing ICC. They are *Knowledge of Culture*, *Attitudes towards Culture*, *Interpreting and Relating Culture*, and *Intercultural Interaction.* Each factor of ICC has objectives and description presented below in Table 1. Also we have supplied the table with examples of phraseology-based tasks.

Table 1. *Four categories of tasks based on English phraseological units aimed at developing ICC*

Factors in intercultural communication	Objectives	Description of the objectives	Examples of tasks	Examples of English phraseological units
Knowledge of Culture	1. To know some facts about culture	In this category tasks should help learners to increase their knowledge about culture-specific events, products etc.	United Kingdom Quiz. *How much do you know about the United Kingdom and its culture?* Use phraseological units in your answers.	*Leave smb. cold*, *the reverse side of the medal*, *to throw cold water, to leave the beaten track, to get out of hand, the upper crust* [4, p. 138].
	2. To understand the concept of culture	This category comprises tasks that contribute to increasing students' knowledge of different ways of defining culture and how culture affects language and communication.	Discuss the questions using phraseological units in your answers. *What does culture mean? How would you live if you were part of more than one culture? What cultural group do you associate yourself with?*	*To be in the red, to take the biscuit, to be middle-of-the-road, to get a finger in every pie* [6, p. 111].
	3. To collect information about culture	This category of tasks asks learners to collect information about their own and foreign culture using external sources.	A British exchange student wishes to learn more about Moldovan monasteries before his arrival. Write him a letter where you tell him about the history of Moldovan monasteries and describe them. Use reference books or relevant websites. Use as many phraseological units as you can in your letter.	*A wet blanket, to take an early bath, to pass the buck, big cheese* [6, p. 113].
Attitudes towards Culture	1. To identify generalizations about culture	In these tasks the students express their impressions, opinions, and attitudes towards their own and foreign culture.	Using phraseological units, write your opinion on the following: *What comes to your mind when referring to culture, when you think about the English people?*	*Build a castle in the air, a pretty kettle of fish, light as a feather, hear a pin drop, make a decision, make a sensation* [2, p. 173].
	2. To change perspectives	Tasks of this kind ask learners to change perspectives with foreign points of view. Here we can use debating and role-playing.	Role-play the situation where one says: "I can buy everything with money". The other believes it to be impossible. Use as many phraseological units as you can.	*The ivory tower, to do one's best, to make nothing of it, to make a bargain* [2, p. 173].
Interpreting and Relating Culture	1. To identify ethnocentric perspectives	These are tasks that ask students to identify ethnocentric perspectives of cultural products (films, paintings, texts etc.).	Read the text *Great Britain: a Country of Traditions* and identify traditions within the seasons of the year. Find phraseological units in the text.	*Once in a blue moon, a white elephant, to cry for the moon, to talk through one's hat, to pay through the nose* [5].
	2. To relate cultural phenomena	Doing these tasks students are asked to relate features of foreign culture to their own. They can be asked to find differences and similarities in different cultures	Now that you have read the text about marriages in English-speaking countries, *which traditions are similar and which are different from marriages in Moldova?* Discuss with your partner, using phraseological units.	*To talk turkey, Dutch courage, to make friends, a tall story, black frost* [5].

Intercultural Interaction	1. To function as a mediator between cultures and deal with conflict situations. 2. To apply abilities in interaction	In these tasks learners are asked to be mediators between conflicting interpretations of cultural phenomena. The tasks of this kind invite learners to communicate with people of foreign cultures by using their knowledge, skills, and attitudes.	Two friends speak on the topic *What is wealth for a man?* Both have different opinions and they argue. There is a conflict between them. Each insists on his own. Using phraseological units, act out a situation with your partner where you find a solution. Imagine the situation where ... *What would you do in this situation? How would you react?* Act out the situation in groups of four, using phraseological units.	*To get up to one's neck, bread and butter, old wives' tales, from the bottom of one's heart* [5]. *To pull somebody's leg, to beat about the bush, to be fed up with, to have green fingers* [5].

Tasks directed to the developing of students' ICC play a particular role, because communicative skills and proficiency are formed by means of creative tasks, just as in different cultural situations in our everyday life. It is necessary to search for English phraseological units suitable for every cultural situation. To solve this problem, teachers can use intercultural communicative events during the lesson. They need to create such conditions for the learners as to make them talk and share their opinions on a certain cultural topic using English phraseological units. In the teaching process the following techniques can be used: solving a problematic cultural situation, discussion, making up dialogues and stories, role-playing. Two factors are of paramount importance here: a manifest interest in the topic and the learners' total involvement in active discussion. In order to implement intercultural communicative events that involve the use of English phraseological units, real life cultural situations may be simulated or examined.

In this study, developing intercultural communicative competence through English phraseological units has been researched. During the investigation we came to the conclusion that English phraseological units can be used to increase intercultural communicative competence in the learners. We have presented particular learning tasks based on phraseological units of English. Byram's model of ICC has been studied and modified to the needs of this study. Four categories of tasks based on English phraseological units aimed at developing ICC have been developed. Their objectives and description have been presented. Also we have supplied examples of phraseology-based tasks.

Summing up, we would highly recommend all teachers of English as a foreign language to develop intercultural communicative competence of their students. It is very important in today's multicultural world. One of the ways to develop this competence is using phraseological units. We suggest that teachers apply four categories of tasks based on English phraseological units aimed at developing ICC. They are *Knowledge of Culture*, *Attitudes towards Culture*, *Interpreting and Relating Culture*, and *Intercultural Interaction.*

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Revista *Didactica Pro...* înseamnă:
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