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ICC assessment – experiences and perspectives¹

ABSTRACT: The paper presents theoretical considerations on the role of dialogue in ICC development and assessment and the model for ICC assessment as a practical application. It is argued here that the application of the idea of dialogue in a Bakhtinian sense may constitute a theoretical framework for ICC assessment since this kind of dialogue involves the presentation of a variety of opinions or ideas. The model for ICC assessment, as it was developed for the purpose of the author's unpublished PhD dissertation, is presented in this paper. The model includes various types of tests that can be incorporated into ICC evaluation. The final part of the discussion attempts at showing the points of convergence between DA approach and the dialogic approach to ICC assessment.

KEYWORDS: dialogue; ICC; assessment.

1. INTRODUCTION

In FLT the concept of communicative competence has been replaced by the concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) following research and publications by Michael Byram or Celia Roberts (Jaeger 1997). They pointed out the need to take into account the fact that communication takes place in a cultural context that preconditions understanding and negotiation of meaning and has bearing on communication.

In discussing language and intercultural communication development various authors have adopted different philosophies that underlie their views on the subject. For example, Roy and Starosta (2001: 16), relying on Gadamer's (1989) hermeneutics, claim that the successful development of intercultural communication is conditioned by a movement "away from

¹ Sections 1, 3- 4 of the article, with slight changes, come from an unpublished PhD dissertation of the author.

immediacy and particularity towards universality". The ultimate goal is a comprehensive horizon where all horizons melt into one fundamental unity of all human beings. Guilherme (2002), on the other hand, bases her way of reasoning on Critical Theory, seen as a philosophical system of principles connected with the Frankfurt School. She believes that the development of ICC should lead to enhanced cultural awareness, the result of which is the critical mind. More precisely, Guilherme shows its applicability to foreign language education in fostering and developing the moral development and orientation towards universal humanistic values, which she terms as Human Rights Education and Education for Democratic Citizenship (2002: 225).

However, it is argued here and in what follows that a discussion of ICC development and its assessment should rather focus on the process and not on the end product. Hence the idea of dialogue, as proposed by Bakhtin (2004), has been chosen as the theory for the model for ICC assessment which will be presented in the subsequent sections of this paper.

2. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

One of the recent developments in ICC assessment is the application of dynamic assessment to ICC evaluation based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory. According to Borghetti (2015: 3) "dynamic assessment (DA) can provide solutions to assess intercultural competence (IC) as it addresses the relation between intercultural competence and intercultural competent performance and the inherently context-sensitive nature of IC." The need to assess ICC results from the fact that "[its] assessment is important for teachers and students: the former monitor and improve the goals, methods and practices of their instruction in the light of their learners' attainments" (Borghetti 2015: 1). In her discussion of IC assessment Borghetti adopts a definition of intercultural competence as an interplay of behavioral, effective and cognitive factors in understanding and interpreting cultural phenomena. The actors of a communicative act, she adds, relate these to their assumed identities. The instruction and assessment are integrated as we learn from others and subsequently internalise this learning.

Borghetti does not give details how this idea works in practice. From the sources available on-line we can learn about a project being implemented at Warwick University, U.K., where DA approach has been applied to ICC assessment². Assessment scenarios, which are called critical incidents, have been based on interview, text and questionnaire data. Borghetti concludes

² <https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/al/research/groups/llta/testing/research/>

that DA approach to IC assessment would allow an insight into internal outcomes and development that might lead to more developed critical cultural awareness. Since teaching and assessing are dialectically integrated the teacher provides input and monitors its reception, and the learner becomes a partner in mediation in which input is provided. The latest findings of how DA is used to test ICC are presented by Claudia Harsch and Matt Poehner (2016), who were involved in the above mentioned project.

3. DIALOGIC RELATIONS IN ICC DEVELOPMENT

The concept of dialogue as developed by Bakhtin has been introduced to the intercultural context of foreign language education by Kramsch (1993) in her book *Context and culture in language teaching*. In her discussion Kramsch (1993: 233 ff.) focuses on the so called third space, which is a contact zone for two parties involved in a communicative act.

It is argued here that a dialogue is also important for another reason. Namely, it allows us to solve the problem of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism. Ethnocentrism, the term that “refers to our tendency to consider our own cultural practices as superior and consider other cultural practices as inferior” (Ting-Toomey 1999: 14) has been excluded from intercultural perspective in favour of an ethnorelative stance, which “emphasises the use of out-group members’ cultural frame of reference in interpreting their behaviour” (Ting-Toomey 1999: 158). Ethnocentrism has been treated as a mark of insufficiently developed ICC. But the issue seems more complex than it is assumed to be by some researchers. In Chastain’s opinion (1988: 387), ethnocentrism can be dangerous in intercultural relations, especially in the situation in which a foreign culture is judged by the standards of the native culture. On the other hand, he emphasises the role of ethnocentrism in the formation of one’s identity. For young people ethnocentrism constitutes a positive value serving as the backbone of their socio-cultural system of values. Therefore, although not very much desired in intercultural relationships, ethnocentrism cannot be underestimated. In contrast to a widely shared belief (Bennett 1993) that ethnocentrism is to be replaced by ethnorelativism which will involve altering one’s response to otherness and a foreign culture, the idea of dialogue seems more appropriate than ethnorelativism. Dialogue offers a person a choice. In intercultural dialogue a person can choose to stick to his/her old values or to allow a change. As Bauman ([1990] 1996: 164f.) observes the natural tendency for a native culture is hegemony, so when one’s native culture comes into contact with a foreign culture feelings of uncertainty may appear and enforce the rejection of the foreign cul-

ture. To handle this kind of situation successfully two parties involved in a communicative act are expected to show an open attitude and readiness to enter a dialogue. Shi-Xu (2001: 9) claims that dialogue is necessary in order to experience pedagogical and cultural transformation.

Secondly, although both Gadamer (Roy and Starosta 2001: 10) and Bakhtin (Sidorkin 1999: 25) refer to ways of knowing through dialogue, i.e. dialogism as the characteristic epistemological mode of a world, these two philosophers diverge in their treatment of meaning and "the other" in dialogue. Namely, Gadamer believes that there is a singular meaning of a text. For Bakhtin the meaning of a text is constructed in the process of interaction. Contrary to Bakhtin, Gadamer believes that understanding the other is achieved through "fusion of horizons between the rhetor and the audience", through appropriating "the other" (Czerniak 2002: X), through making the unknown known, so that the reception of "the other" is possible (Waldenfels [1997] 2002: 84). Gadamer's dialogic method assumes that it is possible to overcome "otherness" (Waldenfels [1997] 2002: 146). However, the dialogue whose aim is to get to the universal truth is in fact a monologue with the roles of asking questions and answers ascribed to its participants (Waldenfels [1997] 2002: 125). This places Gadamer miles apart from Bakhtin who strongly advocated the polyphony of the world and a dialogue in which many voices are heard.

Critical hermeneutics (Gadamer) stands in opposition to dialogic epistemology (Bakhtin). While critical hermeneutics pursues the modern thought of the power of mind and the development of critical cultural awareness Bakhtin's dialogic epistemology discovers meaning from the point of addressing the other. "A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another foreign meaning" (Bakhtin 2004: 7). As Godzich notes (2003: 13): "Nor is Bakhtin's dialogic to be confused with a Gadamerian conversation in which one loses oneself or in which there occurs a fusion of horizons. The central notion of the dialogic is antagonistic. It is a refusal of any symbiosis and a rejection of the undifferentiated; it is meant to allow the conflictual definition of differences as constitutive elements of a postrevolutionary and postmodern society". The dialogue in a Bakhtinian sense allows the parties of a communicative act to cherish their freedom and at the same time respect each other. Hence, it is believed that Bakhtin's understanding of dialogic relations offers good theoretical grounds for tracing the development of ICC.

According to the principles of intercultural dialogue everybody has the right to approach a text with their own culture in mind, and present one's own discourse, not necessarily the dominant one. By the same token one's voice contributes to the polyphony of the world, and is marked by the

same cultural status as the dominant discourse. In order to preserve one's own voice in intercultural encounters one acknowledges the fact that history has many interpretations and that language is ideological and moral, and connected with power and knowledge. In the dialogic relations the voice of "the other" helps to understand the "I". As Witkowski (2000: 199f.) claims, all this can be accomplished in a dialogue understood in a Bakhtinian way since this kind of dialogue is characterised by polyphony, outsidenedness and understanding.

Therefore, it is believed that the dialogic approach to ICC development and its application to the model for ICC assessment is effective. The dialogue can lead to intercultural transformations in one's attitude. Such transformations are seen as an element of human development towards a better understanding and more open and sensitive attitude to the other.

4. THE MODEL FOR ICC ASSESSMENT

The model tries to incorporate both the previously used tools (with slight modifications) for assessing attitudes and perceptions of a foreign culture (Byram et al. 1991, Hammer et al. 2003) as well as novel tools. The latter ones were designed with the demands of successful ICC testing as proposed by Byram (1997), Lantolf (1999), Lazar (2003) and Valette ([1977] 1996). The first requirement is not to limit assessment only to quantitative testing but also expand it in its qualitative aspect. Secondly, the bulk of assessment is carried out by means of tests as these are relatively easily administered in educational settings, but their nature and scope are related to a range of subjects such as literature, history, everyday culture, traveling experience as well as varied test-types. This is grounded in the belief that ICC transcends the borders of one subject and in itself is an interdisciplinary competence. A variety of tests may help account for different needs that are sought in education. The model for ICC assessment takes into account a range of objectives that the teacher as cultural mediator tries to achieve, such as developing the right attitude towards the other, stirring students' interests in foreign culture, expanding their ability to compare and contrast or to observe and discover foreign culture phenomena (Byram and Risager 1999, Witkowski 2000, Zawadzka 2004).

The model is eclectic in its nature referring to a number of categories and modes of testing presented by different authors involved in investigations of ICC development. The main idea is however that areas tested in the model correspond to three inter-related areas distinguished in Byram's model: atti-

tudes (*savoir-être*), behaviour (*savoir fair/appredre*), and knowledge (*savoir*) (Byram 1997: 34), and the questionnaire was based on Seelye's model.

The instruments for testing these areas derive from different fields of science that contribute to the research on ICC such as psychology, anthropology, language didactics and language testing. Thus, the first group of tests (psychometric tests) measure attitudes. In order to test attitudes Osgood's semantic differential technique and Likert scale were used, following the previous research in the field by Byram et al. (1991) and Hammer et al. (2003). The second group of tests aims at testing knowledge. These tests are constructed on the basis of general cultural knowledge and include critical incidents tests (as proposed by Elashmawi and Maruyama 2003), cultural referents tests (designed by the author according to ideas put forward by Valette) which are norm-referenced tests, as well as critical cultural awareness tests (designed by the author in compliance with an ICC assessment model developed by Byram), requiring skills of comparison and contrast, which are designed as criterion-referenced tests. Additionally, the model includes a questionnaire which is based on Seelye's (1993) model of appropriating culture into foreign language teaching. In the questionnaire the interests of students and their skills of observation and enquiry in a foreign environment are investigated. The selection of items tested in norm-referenced tests, which by its nature is quite limited, is compensated for open-ended questions in interviews and in the questionnaire. The qualitative data are obtained in the interviews, where respondents comment on their own experience in intercultural contacts and present their general knowledge on the concepts connected with intercultural training. Additionally, literary texts are incorporated into the assessment of ICC for the sake of the cultural component they offer in learning conditions in which a direct contact with a foreign culture is limited (as suggested by Facciol and Kjartansson 2003).

It must be pointed out that all the sections of the model, i.e. attitude section, knowledge section, questionnaire section, interview section and literature section are not to be treated as clearly divided independent compartments. On the contrary, the overall picture can emerge by treating these sections as mutually complementary in obtaining the whole picture of the process of developing and testing ICC. Secondly, the content of those tests exceeds the content of one subject and refers to the scope of cultural studies, literature, language methodology and history. It involves FL learners' awareness of both their native culture and foreign. Hence, this model aims more at stating whether the process of training heads towards the required direction rather than positioning students' competence at a definite point of the assessment scale.

Figure 1. presents the model in its graphic form as designed by the author of this article. Particular tested areas are presented in the form of circles whose number in fact can be extended/limited at any time and in this way the model can be adjusted to the changing needs of the evaluation process. In the model itself dialogic relations are observed not only at one level, for example as a dialogue between the assessee and the culture content, where the text may also be viewed as the element of interaction (Kramsch 2000: 139), but also between the various levels of the model. The channel that runs through these circles and joins them together is like a dialogical channel. The attitude, knowledge, and skills that are the constitutive elements of ICC are tested in different ways and represented separately in each circle, only for the sake of practicality. In real life situations they in fact cannot be separated and all appear as one in a dialogue. The model presents a multi-dimensional image of the assessed object, in this case ICC.

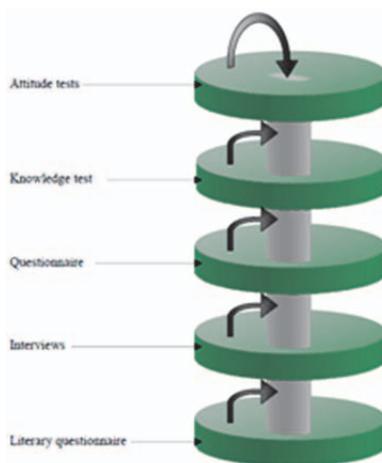


Fig. 1. ICC assessment model

5. CONCLUSIONS

Both in the model described and in DA approach to testing ICC the fact that a person can have different levels of IC in different situations, depending on the contextual factors involved, is highlighted. Furthermore, both models aim at finding a theory (theoretical perspective) that underlies the assessment. In dynamic assessment (DA) assessment and teaching are dialectically integrated. In the model presented in this paper testing (assessment) and the text (context) are integrated through dialogue.

It has to be noticed that DA model tries to expound an important distinction between competence and performance, which is a novel way of looking at ICC assessment.

Borghetti maintains (2005: 4) that “DA would help solve the IC models’ ambiguity between intercultural competence *stricto sensu* and interculturally competent performance.” Dialogic model only implicitly suggests a similar solution albeit arrived at from a different perspective. IC assessment remains a field where more research is needed. Because of its complex nature and ethical questions involved, IC assessment escapes easy solutions and requires in-depth interdisciplinary studies. For some scholars ICC assessment seems questionable. Others, who educate FL learners and work in educational settings, would welcome a set of tools which will allow them to assess their students’ ICC. As Brown observes (2002: 17) “With formative processes of assessment in place, teachers can make appropriate midcourse pedagogical changes to more effectively reach goals.” Many in-service teachers, having a possibility of IC assessment, will probably have a feeling of being on the safe side if they can compare what they are trying to achieve with what their students produce.

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