

TOWARDS DEVELOPING THE SKILL OF TRANSCOMMUNICATING AMONG TERTIARY EDUCATION STUDENTS: THE ROLE OF STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMMES

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Abstract. The objective of the paper is to highlight the need of adjusting the skills of tertiary education graduates to the requirements of the present global world, which entails the idea that higher education should be aimed at developing abilities that will facilitate communicating within and across a variety of communities, ethnicities and cultures. In the paper it is postulated that tertiary education graduates should be equipped, *inter alia*, with the skill of transcommunicating based on the idea of equality of cultures and languages. Due attention is paid to the role of study abroad programmes in the aforementioned process. Accordingly, the research part of the paper delves into the influence of the Erasmus+ mobility on the development of transcommunication among tertiary education students and rests on the analysis of the material gathered during interviews with learners who participated in the international student mobility conducted within The Erasmus+ Framework. The research results point to the key role of experiential learning held in territorial contexts in the process of developing the skill of transcommunicating among the research participants.

Key words: transcommunication, equality of cultures, tertiary education, study abroad programmes, experiential learning in territorial contexts

1. Introduction

Tertiary education constitutes the educational level that seems to be of particular importance in terms of shaping the competences that are applied in one's professional career. Not surprisingly, Polish ministerial regulations strongly emphasise the

need of correlating higher education curricula with what is required by the employment market. Accordingly, the paper will describe selected competences that are a must for tertiary education graduates in terms of the requirements of potential employees. With reference to the above assumption, the article will refer to the skill of successful communication applied in the global environment and highlight that the above is conditioned, *inter alia*, by transcommunication. It will be also suggested that the skill of transcommunicating can be developed via study abroad programmes. The aforementioned idea will be subject to analysis in the research part of the paper.

2. Tertiary education graduates and successful communication in the global environment

The skill of successful communication, which is the result of extensive communicative expertise, constitutes one of the primary requirements of the present-day employment market (Ochyra 2012: 7–38). Due to the fact that the world has become a global village (McLuhan 1962) and the role of transnational corporations has considerably increased (Rosińska-Bukowska 2009), communicative proficiency represented by employees ought to comprise, *inter alia*, the ability of coping with numerous globalisation phenomena, e.g. the homogenisation of culture (O'Connor 2006; Jennings 2010), the rise of the Anglo-Saxon network of meanings as the basis of global communication (Wnuk-Lipiński 2005: 78–79) and the resulting hegemony of the English language and its culture in relation to weaker, non-global languages and cultures (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995; Canagarajah 2005; Fairclough 1995; Fishman 2000; Guo and Beckett 2007; MacPherson and Beckett 2008; Pennycook 1998; Phillipson 1992 *inter alios*). Notably, communicative expertise should also include the skill of handling the negative consequences of the aforementioned hegemony, i.e. the resulting progressive national identity weakening (Canagarajah 2005; Kaul 2012) and the gradual disappearance of the notion of national countries on the one hand, and the rise of fundamentalist tendencies originating from strengthening local values on the other (Abdulsattar 2013; Sztompka 2005; Wnuk-Lipiński 2005 among others)¹.

The above requirements of the employment market, in turn, translate into the realisation of special goals in tertiary education. It is suggested that one of the primary objectives of the field in question should pertain to the formation of communicators who are able to function in global space determined by globalisation processes. In order to be capable of communicating across the global environment successfully, such communicators should be able to transcommunicate.

¹ See also Axford (2013), Bielak (2017), Robinson (2001) and Upali (2017) *inter alia* for a description of the global environment and communication.

3. Transcommunication

Transcommunication (Puppel 2007: 87–88) is founded on the concept of equality of languages and their cultures. It is held in the TRANS- perspective of linguistic contact in which the languages possess the equal awareness position among their users (communicators perceive them as languages of equal status, value and importance). Significantly, the TRANS- perspective is in opposition to the INTER-perspective of language contact and intercommunication in which the languages and their cultures occupy superstratum and substratum awareness positions respectively, i.e. communicators perceive the superstratum (dominant) language and culture as superior to the substratum (dominated) language and culture (see also Bielak 2011a, 2011b, 2014 and Wiertelwska 2014 for the research into Polish-English language contacts in terms of the transcommunicative approach and Wiśniewska 2018 for the analysis of the linguistic contacts in the dyad: Polish-English and the triad: Arabic-English-Polish with regards to the transcommunicative framework).

As already mentioned, in this paper it is postulated that transcommunication should constitute one of the basic skills of tertiary education graduates as in the face of present globalization-oriented phenomena it may (due to the idea of equality of languages and cultures) enable one to prevent intercultural conflicts and preserve identity. The above aim may be achieved, *inter alia*, via the participation in SA programmes.

4. Study Abroad (SA) Programmes and their achievements

SA programmes are generally designed to improve learners' competences connected with functioning and working in a global environment, which is supposed to increase the chances of successful career development after the completion of education. Due to the fact that studies pertaining to SA programmes report numerous achievements in the aforementioned area, it may be assumed that the objectives of SA mobilities are realised. The gains of SA programmes that are usually reported include (*inter alia*):

- a positive impact on students' career development (Bracht et al. 2006; Jahr and Teichler 2002; Janson and Teichler 2007; Janson et al. 2009; Maiworm and Teichler 1996),
- an increase in learners' linguistic proficiency (Davidson 2010; Bracht et al. 2006, Engle 2010; Kinginger 2011; Özbaşaran 2015; Waniek-Klimczak 2011),
- the development of students' intercultural sensitivity (Anderson et al. 2006; Klak and Martin 2003; Leong 2007; Straffon 2003),
- a rise in students' intercultural competence (Behrnd and Porzelt 2012; Biles and Lindley 2009; Engle 2010; Kuriata 2002; Martinsen 2011; Moline 2009; Watson and Wolfel 2015),

- a rise in student's communicative competence (Llanes and Muñoz 2009; Regan et al. 2009),
- positive modifications of students' personalities (Alfred and Byram 2002; Clarke et al. 2009; Coleman and Chafer 2011; Tracy-Ventura et al. 2016),
- an increase in respect for other cultures (Gabryś-Barker 2011; Penbek et al. 2009)
- students' better comprehension of both non-native and native culture (Adamczak-Krysztofowicz 2012; Van Hoof and Verbeeten 2005).

Unfortunately, SA programmes may be also used as tools propagating negative issues connected with globalization. The above is highlighted, for instance, by Biles and Lindley (2009: 148) who admit that “[o]verseas study is an unparalleled method of promoting cross-cultural understanding (...)” but clearly point to the fact that the policy applied by US higher education institutions seems to promote the concept of strong globalization paving the path to unification. The above, in turn, is purportedly supposed to strengthen integration. Accordingly, Biles and Lindley (2009: 153) postulate that SA students, in order to evade globalisation-prone strategies, should first of all concentrate on experiential learning held in territorial contexts and be involved in the ethnographic examination of other cultures. With reference to the above ideas, they propagate the concept of “geographic continuity” (see also Puppel 2017: 124–125 for the role of cultural geography in ecolinguistics) as – in accordance with their opinion – it is geography that “should be at the forefront of liberating overseas studies from the myth of strong globalization” (Biles and Lindley 2009: 153). In other words, Biles and Lindley’s approach excludes the support for globalizing ideas founded on the hegemony of one particular language and its cultural background.

In view of the above information, participation in SA programmes may be treated as a method that can play a vital role in the process of developing the skill of transcommunicating among tertiary education learners. Accordingly, the following sections of the paper will present research into the influence of the Erasmus+ mobility on the development of transcommunication (in which the awareness status of the languages in contact plays a predominant role) with reference to the group of tertiary education students.

5. The study

5.1. Methodology

The research delves into the impact of the Erasmus+ Programme on developing the skill of transcommunicating among tertiary education students. It is based on the material gathered during individual in-depth interviews. The structure of the latter

was not regulated by time constraints but the time of the interviews did not exceed one hour.

The interviews were conducted with 5 tertiary education students who, while studying English as their major, participated in the international student mobility conducted within the Erasmus+ Framework. Student 1 (S1) and Student 2 (S2) spent one year studying out of Poland -in Romania and Slovakia respectively. Additionally, they did their holiday Erasmus practice in England. Student 3 (S3) and Student 4 (S4) studied the whole academic year abroad as well (one semester in Romania and one in Slovakia) but they did not do their practice abroad. Student 5 (S5) spent one semester in Romania.

As already mentioned, the goal of the research was to establish the influence of the Erasmus+ mobility on the development of the idea of transcommunication among the students in question. Accordingly, the research was to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What was the awareness status of the cultures and languages under analysis among the Erasmus+ students before and after the mobility?
2. Did the participation in the Erasmus+ mobility develop the students' skill of transcommunicating?
3. What factors influenced the development of the idea of transcommunication in the case of the students under analysis?
4. What is the role of experiential learning held in territorial contexts on the development of the idea of transcommunication?

The interviews, aimed at gathering the research material, were based on the interview scenario including the following questions:

1. Did you treat the Romanian language and culture before your Erasmus+ mobility as inferior/superior to your native language and culture or did you treat them as equal? What influenced your attitude?
2. Did you treat the Slovak language and culture before your Erasmus+ mobility as inferior/superior to your native language and culture or did you treat them as equal? What influenced your attitude?²
3. Did you treat the English language and its culture before your Erasmus+ mobility as inferior/superior to your native language and culture or did you treat them as equal? What influenced your attitude?
4. Did you treat the English language and its culture before your Erasmus+ mobility as inferior/superior to the Romanian language and culture or did you treat them as equal? What influenced your attitude?
5. Did you treat the English language and its culture before your Erasmus+ mobility as inferior/superior to the Slovak language and culture or did you treat them as equal? What influenced your attitude?³

² The question applies only to the students who participated in the mobility in Slovakia.

6. How do you perceive the position of the Romanian language and culture in relation to your native language and culture after the mobility? Do you treat the languages and cultures as equal? What influenced your attitude?
7. How do you perceive the position of the Slovak language and culture in relation to your native language and culture after the mobility? Do you treat the languages and cultures as equal? What influenced your attitude?⁴
8. How do you perceive the position of the English language and culture in relation to your native language and culture after the mobility? Do you treat the languages and cultures as equal? What influenced your attitude?
9. How do you perceive the position of the English language and culture in relation to the Romanian language and culture after the mobility? Do you treat the languages and cultures as equal? What influenced your attitude?
10. How do you perceive the position of the English language and culture in relation to the Slovak language and culture after the mobility? Do you treat the languages and cultures as equal? What influenced your attitude?⁵

5.2. Research results and analysis

The following section is presented in the form of a numbered list and demonstrates the responses given by the students during interviews and the resulting conclusions.

5.2.1. The research results and their analysis with reference to the awareness status of the Romanian language and its culture in relation to the awareness status of the Polish language and culture

1. Before the mobility the Romanian language and culture was treated as inferior to the Polish language and culture in the case of all the students after analysis, which points to the substratum awareness position of the Romanian language and culture in relation to the Polish language and culture among the Erasmus+ participants.

2. The students emphasise that their attitude resulted from stereotypes regarding Romania and Romanians that exist in Polish culture.

3. The Romanian and Polish language and their cultures became to be seen as equal after the mobility in the case of S1, S2, S3 and S4, which indicates the equal awareness status of the languages and cultures in question among the students after the mobility.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Ibidem.

4. The above change of the attitude was the result of numerous friendships with Romanians developed during the Erasmus+ mobility and familiarisation with Romanian culture which the students liked. The responses given by S1, S2, S3 and S4 include, *inter alia*, the following opinions:

- Romanian people are very friendly and helpful,
- the territory of Romania is beautiful and full of interesting places to visit,
- now (i.e. after the mobility) I will never allow anyone from my company to express negative opinions about Romania and Romanians,
- if some people frown upon the Romanian country and culture, I answer that you must first visit Romania to realise how beautiful it is and make friends with Romanians to understand that you can really find friendship in countries that are not rich,
- Romanian culture is quite similar to Polish culture and both the cultures are equally interesting and valuable.

5. S5 claims that she perceived the Romanian language and its culture as less prestigious than the Polish language and its culture before the mobility and the Erasmus+ mobility did not influence her views, which designates the substratum status of the Romanian language and its culture with regards to the Polish language and its culture in the post-mobility awareness of S5.

6. Additionally, the student states that her mobility did not increase her communicative skills as her speaking performance is generally blocked by shyness, which limits her contacts with others.

5.2.2. The research results and their analysis in terms of the awareness status of the Slovak language and its culture in relation to the awareness status of the Polish language and culture

1. Slovak and Polish culture and their languages were perceived as equal by S1, S2, S3 and S4 (S5 did not participate in the mobility in Slovakia) both before the Erasmus+ exchange and after it, which indicates the equal pre- and post-mobility awareness status of the Slovak language and its culture in relation to the Polish language and its culture among the students participating in the mobility in Slovakia.

2. The participants in the Erasmus+ mobility in Slovakia state that their pre-mobility attitude was the result of the opinions on Slovak culture and its language that occur in their environment and the studies in Slovakia consolidated the view on the equal position of the Slovak and Polish language and their cultures (i.e. the research participants did not experience any situations that would have caused the impression that the Slovak language and culture were superior or inferior to the Polish language and culture).

5.2.3. The results of the research and their analysis with reference to the awareness status of the English language and culture with regards to the awareness status of the other languages and cultures in the contacts under analysis

1. S1, who participated in his practice mobility in England, reports that before going to England he perceived the English language and its culture as more prestigious than the Polish, Slovak and Romanian languages and their cultures. He also thought that life in England represented a higher standard. The above attitude was formed under the influence of the materials presented during his English language classes which demonstrated Anglo-Saxon communication and culture in a very attractive way.

2. In other words, the pre-mobility position of the English language and culture with regards to the other languages respectively in the contacts under analysis in S1's awareness represented the superstratum status.

3. However, while staying in England, he realised that his view of Anglo-Saxon culture and communication was idealised. S1 noticed a lot of unfavourable phenomena during his visit to England, e.g. he observed quite a few negative behaviours of Anglo-Saxon people in different situations. As a result, he no longer thinks that Polish culture and language are less prestigious. He started appreciating Poland, its culture and language and the way Polish people live. The same applies to Slovak and Romanian languages and their cultures.

4. From the above it therefore follows that after the mobility realised in England the English language and culture and Polish, Slovak and Romanian languages and their cultures occupy the equal position in S1's awareness.

5. S2 (who also did her practice in England) holds opinions similar to those expressed by S1, i.e. in her awareness the pre-mobility status of the English language and its culture as opposed to the Polish, Slovak and Romanian languages and their cultures is superstratum, whereas the post-mobility awareness positions of the languages in question is equal. She emphasises that at the beginning of her stay in England she was ashamed to say that she was from Poland but after she had had a chance to observe different situations typical of Anglo-Saxon life, she was no longer ashamed of her Polish origin. Now she is proud that she is Polish and says it is good to come back to Poland after a stay abroad. She is satisfied with the life in her own country as it is not worse than the life in England.

6. Before their mobilities, S3 and S4 (who realised their Erasmus+ exchange in Romania and Slovakia but did not do their practice in England) treated the English language and its culture as more prestigious than the Polish, Romanian and Slovak languages and their cultures (which indicates, in S3 and S4's awareness, the superstratum position of the English language and its culture with reference to the status of the other languages and their cultures in the contacts under analysis). Their opin-

ions were formed on the basis of the appealing image of Anglo-Saxon cultural elements that prevail in the Polish environment and are also used in the process of English language teaching in Poland.

7. After S3 and S4's mobilities in Romania and Slovakia the relation described above – in which English predominates and occupies the superstratum position – continues to prevail in their awareness. Both in Romania and Slovakia S3 and S4 did not experience any situations that would have presented Anglo-Saxon communication and culture in a negative way. However, they emphasise that they did not have many contacts with Erasmus+ students who were of British origin, which means that the probability of encountering any negative phenomena connected with real Anglo-Saxon culture was very low.

8. Therefore, in the case of S3 and S4 there is no identified awareness change in terms of the status of the English language and its culture as opposed to the position of the other languages under analysis and their cultures.

9. Before her mobility, S5 (who participated only in one Erasmus+ exchange in Romania) perceived the English language and culture as more prestigious than the Polish and Romanian languages and their cultures (which points to the superstratum position of the English language and culture with reference to the status of the Polish language and culture and the Romanian language and culture respectively in S5's awareness). Again, her view was formed during her English classes held within the framework of the Polish educational system that presented Anglo-Saxon culture in an extremely attractive way.

10. After her mobility in Romania, S5 continues to perceive the English language and its culture as superior to the Polish and Romanian languages and their cultures, i.e. the English language and culture continue to possess the superstratum position in S5's awareness, whereas the Polish and Romanian languages and their cultures, in the opinion of S5, have the substratum awareness status in relation to the English language and its culture. By analogy with S3 and S4, S5 did not experience any situation in Romania that would have contributed to the change in her view on Anglo-Saxon communication and culture.

11. The research participants' pre- and post-mobility awareness status of the languages and cultures under analysis are demonstrated in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively.

5.2.4. The influence of the participation in the Erasmus+ mobility in the process of developing the students' skill of transcommunicating

1. The participation in the Erasmus+ mobility developed the skill of transcommunication based on the idea of equality of cultures in the case of S1, S2, S3 and S4, i.e. the mobility contributed to generating a change in the status of the languages in contact in the awareness of the research participants.

Table 1. The research participants' pre-mobility awareness status of the languages and cultures under analysis

Student	S1		S2		S3		S4		S5	
Country of mobility	Romania, Slovakia, Great Britain		Romania, Slovakia, Great Britain		Romania, Slovakia		Romania, Slovakia		Romania	
Pre-mobility awareness status of the Romanian language and culture in relation to the Polish language and culture	Romanian	Polish	Romanian	Polish	Romanian	Polish	Romanian	Polish	Romanian	Polish
	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum
Pre-mobility awareness status of the Slovak language and culture in relation to the Polish language and culture	Slovak	Polish	Slovak	Polish	Slovak	Polish	Slovak	Polish	not applicable	not applicable
	equal	equal	equal	equal	equal	equal	equal	equal	not applicable	not applicable
Pre-mobility awareness status of the English language and culture with regards to the Polish language and culture	English	Polish	English	Polish	English	Polish	English	Polish	English	Polish
	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum
Pre-mobility awareness status of the English language and culture with regards to the Slovak language and culture	English	Slovak	English	Slovak	English	Slovak	English	Slovak	not applicable	not applicable
	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	not applicable	not applicable
Pre-mobility awareness status of the English language and culture with regards to the Romanian language and culture	English	Romanian	English	Romanian	English	Romanian	English	Romanian	English	Romanian
	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum

Table 2. The research participants' post-mobility awareness status of the languages and cultures under analysis

Student	S1		S2		S3		S4		S5	
	Romania, Slovakia, Great Britain		Romania, Slovakia, Great Britain		Romania, Slovakia		Romania, Slovakia		Romania	
Post-mobility awareness status of the Romanian language and culture in relation to the Polish language and culture	Romanian	Polish	Romanian	Polish	Romanian	Polish	Romanian	Polish	Romanian	Polish
	equal	equal	equal	equal	equal	equal	equal	equal	substratum	super-stratum
Post-mobility awareness status of the Slovak language and culture in relation to the Polish language and culture	Slovak	Polish	Slovak	Polish	Slovak	Polish	Slovak	Polish	not applicable	not applicable
	equal	equal	equal	equal	equal	equal	equal	equal	not applicable	not applicable
Post-mobility awareness status of the English language and culture with regards to the Polish language and culture	English	Polish	English	Polish	English	Polish	English	Polish	English	Polish
	equal	equal	equal	equal	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum
Post-mobility awareness status of the English language and culture with regards to the Slovak language and culture	English	Slovak	English	Slovak	English	Slovak	English	Slovak	not applicable	not applicable
	equal	equal	equal	equal	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	not applicable	not applicable
Post-mobility awareness status of the English language and culture with regards to the Romanian language and culture	English	Romanian	English	Romanian	English	Romanian	English	Romanian	English	Romanian
	equal	equal	equal	equal	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum	super-stratum	substratum

2. However, the degree of influence of the mobility on developing transcommunication varies among the research participants.

3. The strong degree of impact of the Erasmus+ mobility on the development of transcommunication can be identified in the case of Student 1 and 2 due to the fact that:

- a. it consolidated the equal awareness status of the Slovak language and its culture in relation to the Polish language and culture,
- b. it contributed to the rise of the equal awareness status with regards to the relation between:
 - the English language and culture and the Polish, Slovak and Romanian languages and their cultures,
 - the Romanian language and culture and the Polish language and culture.

4. In the case of S3 and S4 one can recognise the moderately strong degree of impact of the Erasmus+ mobility on developing the skill of transcommunicating as the participation in the Erasmus+ programme:

- a. led to forming the equal awareness position of the Romanian language and culture with regards to the Polish language and culture,
- b. contributed to consolidating the equal awareness relation existing between the Slovak language and its culture and the Polish language and culture,
- c. did not cause the modification of the superstratum awareness position of the English language and culture in relation to the Polish, Slovak and Romanian language and culture.

5. The participation in the Erasmus+ mobility did not affect the development of the skill of transcommunicating with regards to S5 due to the fact that the mobility did not contribute to modifying the superstratum awareness position of:

- a. the Polish language and culture in relation to the Romanian language and culture,
- b. the English language and culture with regards to the Polish and Romanian language and their cultures.

5.2.5. Factors that influenced the development of transcommunication in the case of particular students and the role of experiential learning

1. It was the experience gained in a territorial context (i.e. the students' stay in the original environment of a given culture) that contributed to the rise of the equal awareness position of:

- a. the Polish, Romanian and Slovak languages and their cultures and the English language and culture in the case of S1 and S2,
- b. the Polish language and culture and the Romanian language and culture in the case of S1, S2, S3 and S4.

2. In the case of S3 and S4 the lack of modification in the superstratum awareness status of the English language and culture with regards to the other languages entering the contacts in questions may be attributed to the absence of the original environment of Anglo-Saxon culture.

3. The lack of change in the superstratum awareness position of the Polish language and culture with regards to the Romanian language and culture in the case of S5 who realised her mobility in the territorial context of Romanian culture may be the result of certain limitations that exist in S5's character, i.e. her shyness, which hinders the development of contacts with other people and, in consequence, constricts the process of familiarisation with a new culture.

4. In the face of the above conclusions it is assumed that experiential learning held in territorial contexts (propagated by Biles and Lindley 2009) plays a key role in the process of developing transcommunication among the research participants.

6. Conclusions

The paper has presented the qualitative study of the impact of the Erasmus+ mobility on the development of the skill of transcommunicating at the level of tertiary education. The issue that has been clearly pushed to the foreground in the analysis of the research is the significant role of the original environment of a given culture in the process of developing cross-cultural understanding in communication. Since the idea of building cultural bridges via educational means is of vital importance at present, the problem under analysis should be treated as a field that constitutes a rich source of ideas for further detailed research, especially of the quantitative type. The conclusions of the paper might be also used by university international relations offices to propagate the idea of studying abroad among tertiary education students.

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