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Productive Foreign Language Skills for an Intercultural World

A Guide (not only) for Teachers

Introduction

The past two decades have created both quantitatively higher and qualitatively different demands for foreign language skills. A mere handful of the plentiful developments which have led to this demand include the increasing technological development bridging people and requiring new literacies, the wide accessibility of information sources, social media, shifts in the international political scene, corporate mergers, the outsourcing surge, massive global migration, and the unprecedented rush for education.

The aims for which languages are being learnt and used today have accordingly changed as well, in parallel with learners' needs and expectations. On the one hand, given the dominant position of English as the world's *lingua franca*, some of the earlier native speaker-oriented models and norms have become interrogated and invalidated. In their place, communicative, pragmatic and intercultural competences have entered the limelight and gained in importance in language curricula, becoming equiponderant—if not *more* important than the customary purely linguistic core—components of *intercultural communicative competence*. The role is also increasing of languages for specific, business or academic purposes, and here too recognition is being given to the fact that narrowing down the context of use does not mean a reduction of the syllabus, but rather the need for an awareness and inclusion of the above-mentioned competences. The teaching of languages other than English has likewise been affected by the heightened focus on what learners *can do with* language (rather than what they *know about* it), and explains the consequent emphasis on such productive skills as speaking, writing, interaction and mediation.

This collective volume with fourteen contributions by experienced educators, teacher trainers and researchers from diverse linguistic, cultural and professional settings offers a fresh perspective on the aspects and ways of teaching skills which are crucial to 21st-century language instruction, especially at the more advanced stages. These methods are regrettably oftentimes neglected in the classroom, whether due to shortage of time, or the lack of awareness about the importance of the competences concerned. This book discusses issues ranging from approaches to teaching, contexts of instruction, testing and assessment to curriculum development and using technology in the classroom.

When we try to think what it means to *know* a foreign language, the first ability that comes to mind is that of **speaking** – indeed, it is considered the defining skill of linguistic competence, evident in the very question "Do you *speak* [insert

language here]?" Consequently, this volume kicks off with three contributions devoted to developing that skill at higher levels of proficiency.

One of the hallmarks that characterise proficient speakers is proper use of discourse markers. This is the topic of a corpus-based study by DO Thi Quy Thu and Richard B. BALDAUF, who compare the use of different categories of these features in spoken English by native and advanced non-native users. Their study highlights the problems which L_2 users encounter, and provides some pedagogical implications for helping learners to not only improve the comprehensibility of their utterances, but also to make these more natural.

Despite being the most emphasised skill in communicative language teaching, speaking is also one of the most difficult to develop, partly because it causes the highest levels of anxiety in the language classroom. Michał B. PARADOWSKI, Klaudia DMOWSKA and Dagmara CZASAK investigate this issue in depth, analysing what exactly causes learners' apprehension, and offering solutions that will make them more confident participants in class activities.

Agnieszka DZIĘCIOŁ-PĘDICH homes in on a related subject by investigating the challenges surrounding the development of speaking skills in courses of Business English, and offers several useful recommendations. This chapter at once serves as a foray into the topic of developing **communicative competence for a multilingual and multicultural workspace**, environments that are characteristic of today's business transactions.

Similarly to the previous authors, Veronica-Diana ARMAŞU strives to enhance students' confidence and competence in oral performance, but with a special focus on operating in intercultural business settings. Her chapter argues for the reconsideration of business language curricula to address the new market realities of tomorrow, showing how to choose communicative tasks optimal for the development of strategies that will be indispensable in multilingual workspaces.

The turn of the century witnessed an enormous shift in global business communication, with tradespeople needing to navigate international settings more than ever before. Miya KOMORI-GLATZ explores the rise of English as a *lingua franca* in business university programs, forcibly making a case for continued language instruction at the tertiary level, and for the inclusion in language curricula of pragmatic and skills-based intercultural competence components.

The goal of language educators today is to foster L_2 users who will be both *linguistically capable* and *culturally competent*. While culture has nearly always been present as a component of foreign language teaching, it was usually marginalised. It is only in the last couple of decades, with Michael Byram's emphasis on intercultural communicative competence and the subsequent 'new literacies'

pedagogies, that it has received its due place and proper attention. Still, typically in the language classroom, especially in largely linguistically homogeneous environments, the primary—if not sole—source of cultural knowledge is the course book. Developing cultural awareness by teaching *about* it will often be perceived as rather dull and abstract. More effectiveness can be achieved with approaches which allow the students to *experience* **the other culture through direct contact with its members**. This is the theme of the next two chapters.

Gregory L. THOMPSON begins by showing how to develop language skills and cultural competencies using service learning. After a perusal of reflective journals and surveys, he presents examples demonstrating how via authentic communicative interactions with representatives of diverse Hispanic dialects and cultures, learners can develop new cultural insights and the ability and comfort to function in a wider variety of settings.

But what if access to members of the target language community is more difficult to achieve? Constanza TOLOSA, Helen VILLERS and Martin EAST offer a perspective from the isolated Aotearoa/New Zealand on the other side of the Pacific. They show how the cultural dimension can be brought into the classroom with the help of technology, teaching pupils to explore cultural similarities and differences via online engagement with foreign peers.

Since the instructor is one of the most central factors that affect students' progress, the ensuing section investigates further aspects of **fostering intercultural communicative competence** as seen **from the *teacher's* perspective**. Thus, in her case-study approach, WU Chiu-Hui closely explores educators' cultural teaching practices and the strategies they employ, advocating how teaching intercultural communication should not limit itself to the target language and culture, but also address more global issues. She demonstrates how such approaches have the benefit of challenging students' stereotypes as well as helping them share their personal experiences, and makes recommendations for selecting supplementary materials.

The development of pragmatic and intercultural competence is a long and arduous process. Isabel ALONSO-BELMONTE and María FERNÁNDEZ-AGÜERO demonstrate why relying on the textbook alone is insufficient and problematic, and on the basis of a course book case study offer ways to make up for these shortcomings with skills-building activities that prepare students for cultural diversity and tolerance.

As can be gleaned from the previous two chapters, despite the growing need for propagating intercultural education, few general-purpose language teaching materials exist that can fulfil this aim. The chapter by Ewa MACIEJEWSKA-STĘPIEŃ

also proposes recommendations for the design of such a syllabus, this time basing her proposals on the conclusions of a three-year European project specifically focused on fostering the intercultural dimension in language pedagogy.

The importance of intercultural competence has also received support from policymakers. In a comprehensive evaluation of the *European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages*, Ewa BANDURA critically examines pre-service teachers' perceptions of whether this self-assessment tool performs its intended goals, focusing on the most relevant descriptors of competences related to intercultural language training. The chapter discusses to what extent the *EPOSTL* really stimulates future teachers' self-reflection and autonomous learning, and prepares them to perform the role of intercultural mediators in progressively multicultural environments.

Self-reflection and self-evaluation are helpful in fostering all skills and competences. The last three authors address the multifaceted nature of **developing writing skills**, whose importance and frequency in language use cannot be ignored.

Sabina A. NOWAK examines students of English Philology in order to help them self-assess their writing skills, with long-term goals including the facilitation of reflective thinking in their lifelong learning process. The author draws conclusions regarding the success of introducing such evaluation in the curriculum and the reliability of students' subjective judgments, examines the expectations, needs and problems of the writing class, and concludes by establishing constructive principles which can be applied to teaching.

Agnieszka LEŃKO-SZYMAŃSKA focuses on one end of the spectrum characteristic of advanced interlanguage, that of overuse. Drawing on three corpora of English, she focuses on discrepancies between the use of connectors among native speakers (expert writers and students), and advanced learners. Her subsequent qualitative analysis reveals that novice writers' abundant use of linking devices often serves to mask cohesion problems with the construction of an effective argument. The author forcibly argues that this frequently observed overuse is probably teaching-induced, and offers implications for pedagogy which will result in students' production that will be not only more native-like, but at once more expert-like.

Naturally, instruction and 'overtraining' are not the sole sources of unnatural or clumsy foreign-language writing. Despite the ups and downs of Contrastive Analysis, there is no denying the fact that an important influential factor, even at advanced levels of language use, is the writer's mother tongue. The text by Behzad GHONSOOLY and Seyyed Mohammad Reza ADEL focuses on the role

of students' L$_1$ in composing both narrative and expository texts, additionally taking into account factors such as learners' cultural backgrounds, conditions for learning, and socioeconomic status.

Issues surrounding the contexts, needs and purposes of language use in an increasingly multilingual and multicultural world are diverse and multifaceted. The topics covered in this book are by no means exhaustive. However, we hope and trust that the volume you are holding in your hands, drawing on the different methodologies, with its strong emphasis on classroom applications and reflective practice, will resonate with your teaching context and offer a new outlook and source of practical and effective state-of-the-art solutions for teaching productive skills in the 21st century.

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