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Abstract: *The present paper addresses the role of interculturality in foreign language teaching (English as a second language and Romanian as a foreign language). The relevance of interculturality in the teaching of other subjects in an internationalized context is highly marked by the two components at play here: intercultural communication and intercultural competence.*
Key-words: *interculturality, plurilingualism, multilingualism, lingua franca, communication*

Rezumat: *Studiul de față vizează rolul interculturalității în predarea limbilor străine (engleza ca limba a doua și româna ca limbă străină). Relevanța dimensiunii interculturale în actul predării altor subiecte în context internaționalizat este susținută de cele două componente angajate în acest proces: comunicarea și competența interculturală.*
Cuvinte-cheie: *interculturalitate, plurilingvism, multilingvism, lingua franca, comunicare*

Cultural diversity and CEFR

The management of key-concepts such as cultural diversity, (supra)national identity or internationalization stems from the socio-economic and educational range of mutations in a Europe that conceives of and advertises itself as multicultural. The philosopher and essayist Paul Michael Lützeler defines European identity as a predominantly multicultural and careful to "*preserve the specificity of each European nation*" (Lützeler apud Tartler, 2006: 23). Lützeler warns us against the possibilities of overlooking the fact that the European identity claims its dialogic character that is illustrated by the fact that two or more "*types of logic compete in a complementary but also antagonistic way*" (Lützeler apud Tartler, 2006: 24).

The many aspects of cultural diversity do not escape a similar process of restless debate, which in turn generates conflicts and different when not entirely divergent opinions and facilitates the configuration of a generous conceptual sphere, inclusive of terms such as interculturality.

A declared interest on the part of educational scientific authorities for interculturality has once again been reinforced at the occasion of the Geneva Forum of 2-4th November 2010, which was hosted by the Language Policy Division and gathered over 200 participants from EU member states, representatives of the Council of Europe – which helped publish the conclusions of the forum – and associate organizations (the European Commission, OECD) together with educational specialists from countries such as Switzerland or Canada. The contributions of the meeting reiterate the preoccupations of formerly constituted educational bodies like the Language Policy Division, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The event brought an element of novelty to the attention of educational experts, namely the launch of the Platform of References and Resources for Plurilingual and Intercultural Education that promotes these two key-aspects in the educational process today: plurilingualism and interculturality.

A perusal of the documents included in the platform and easily accessible by a simple search on the webpage of the Council of Europe at www.coe.int/lang/en will help clarify the dominant role of the intercultural dimension to the teaching process, regardless of the subject in question (but especially in the case of the foreign languages). This dimension recommends itself as a good indicator of the present-day social phenomena envisioning individuals in a world of mobility, emigration and immigration and insisting on the need to adapt the existing curricula to the recent socio-economic needs.

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One of the documents on the platform – entitled Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education – sets to define key-terms for our understanding of the progressive unfolding of the intercultural dimension and includes reference to plurilingualism[2], multilingualism[3], pluriculturality[4] and interculturality defined as "*the ability to experience another culture and analyse that experience*" (Beacco et al., 2010: 16).

Interculturality: intercultural communication and competence

Intercultural communication is considered a constitutive element in the act of speaking and in the communicative competence. The CE guide of 2002 regarding the development of the intercultural dimension in language teaching (Byram et al., 2002) conceives of the communicative competence not only as assimilation and use of correct language, but also proper and adequate to certain situations of cultural contexts. The idea of a dialogic pattern occurs again in discussing the contact between two speakers from two different cultural backgrounds, each situated between the pole of a certain *lingua franca* and the mother tongue, the national language. Intercultural competence helps remedy the communicative situation in that it "*also develops their intercultural competence i.e. their ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality*" (Byram et al., 2002: 9-10).

A quick overview of the components of intercultural competence will help us better understand the dynamics of a culturally challenging act of communication and possibly manage similar communicative situations. The threefold components known as knowledge, skills and attitudes – all resulting in a type of supra-component called critical cultural awareness (essential to the process and functioning of intercultural communication). Knowledge of the culture and its social implications resumes HOW we perceive the others and how we are perceived. In other words, *"[i]f it can be anticipated with whom one will interact, then knowledge of that person's world is useful*" (Byram et al., 2002: 12).

Skills that are important to intercultural communication are subdivided into skills of comparison, interpreting and relating and they become the task of the teachers, just as much as providing or transferring knowledge is. Intercultural attitudes rest at the foundation of intercultural competence in that they testify to a certain "curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" (Byram et al., 2002: 12).

The intercultural dimension and its relevance to the international MA programmes

Starting from the premise that international MA programmes have a multicultural component and representation and that they provide a space for scientific communication with an intercultural note, we take the foreign language to be not only the vehicle to the subject in question, but its complementary aspect – which can only clarify the role of the linguistic and cultural components in the act of teaching and learning.

Whether these two aspects are indeed complementary to the scientific component remains to be confirmed by further investigations. An interesting conclusion was formulated by the SWOT analysis of the international MA programmes at the West University of Timişoara, published in Quality Assurance Review, where Professor Liliana Donath records students' perspective on the reciprocal determination of these aspects, with a focus on the need to improve the linguistic competence. If strengths included a good development of communicative skills, the access to European values and mobilities (all inclusive of a certain cultural competence), weaknesses listed around 6 issues

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2   Defined as "*the ability to use more than one language*" (Beacco et al., 2010: 16);

3   Defined as "*the presence of several languages in a given geographical area, regardless of those who speak them*" – *Ibid;*

4   Defined as "*the desire and ability to identify with several cultures, and participate in them*"- *Ibid;*

that deserve our attention: insufficient hours devoted to the improvement of linguistic skills, the difficulties of acquiring specialized languages and other similar problems (Donath, 2011: 150-151).

If the linguistic competence can be developed through various strategies and methods, the cultural and intercultural competence takes much longer (time and effort). The above-mentioned Guide insists that *"[c]ultural learning goes on throughout life"* (Byram et al., 2002: 17). Moreover, it covers more than the CEFR has to offer, in that it engages transversal competences, as well as a type of teaching that is centred on the student's individual cultural background or *baggage*.

English language teaching and / in international MA programmes. Who's afraid of foreign languages?

If we can agree that the linguistic competence is inherent to the scientific one, and not additional to it, we will see that communicating a type of information cannot be resumed to either just language proficiency or to the scientific grounding of the information only. Communicating it requires a combination of both. (Foreign) language proficiency facilitates information communication and, certainly, makes it more accessible or, why not, more attractive. We cannot speak of a relationship of subordination, but interdependence of the two: language and knowledge:

This diversity of relations between language and knowledge prompts us to consider that language is essential to knowledge and to take the fullest possible account of the variety of functions that language can perform (expounding, transposing, transforming and creating knowledge) in the teaching of school subjects and their appropriation by learners (Beacco et al., 2010: 8).

As for making English attractive, one needs to look into its intercultural dimensions and its occasional failures to deliver/mediate intercultural communication. A classic joke addressed the nature of English as an internationally spoken language and as an answer to the question: Which is the language most widely spoken in the world? The answer lists Chinese, English, Arabic, but also Bad (Broken) English. Hence, the many studies devoted to the predictable deviation of English language from the standard or norm.

Yukio Tsuda – one of the defenders of linguistic national identity faced with the *hegemony* of English seen as a "*source of inequality, injustice, and discrimination in intercultural and international communication*" (Tsuda, 2010: 248) – provides a short inventory of the many labels attached to English language over the years:

- *Linguistic imperialism* (Robert Phillipson)
- *International discourse* (Alastair Pennycook)
- *Hegemony* (Ulrich Ammon)
- *English-only ideology* (Donald Macedo)
- *Linguicism* (Tove-Skutnabb-Kangas)

Deviation from the standard or the norm comes from the frequent appeal to the unflattering BE (Broken English) used to denote insufficient linguistic proficiency – a label produced by the speakers of English and considered derogatory by the defenders of the national(ist) perspective.

English as a *lingua franca* has become characteristic of the science and technology, business and finance fields. Their specialists attest a certain language proficiency that conclude specialized terminology, but also linguistic refinement and style. They are aware that English has become "*a language without nation*" (Tartler, 2006: 103-104) and that its use represents both a professional and a personal advantage, especially in intercultural communication. More or less alarming statistics warn us that by mid-2050s, more than half of the world population will fluently speak English (Tartler, 2006: 103-104).

One of the studies devoted to the investigation of the *dominance* of English in the field of science, edited by Ulrich Ammon in 2001 and entitled *The Dominance of English as A Language of Science*, goes back to the beginning of the 20th century, when French, German and English were the linguistic vehicles for scientific publications – a situation that has changed once the authoritative status of English hovers over most of the scientific (written) contributions at the rise of the 21st century. Scientists – adds

Ammon – have to choose between adopting the already-at-hand English terminology and producing their own concepts, calibrating them against the existing one and promoting them on the international market (Ammon, 2001: 350). The author is worried that German universities open their gates to foreign students by showing a preference for English as a language of teaching – an attitude that is condemned by both Ammon and the policy of multilingualism in Europe. The volume edited by Ammon also recycles less inflated attitudes, like that of Robert Kaplan, whose contribution is aimed at better understanding the mechanisms whereby English penetrated the international market. He insists that it is the people speaking the language and not the language possessing a virtual will of its own are the main promoters of English. Kaplan compares the linguistic situation with the popularity that baseball acquired in Japan; it is the apparently glamorous life of baseball players, the huge salaries and the beer-hot-dog industry that makes the sport so attractive to the Japanese, instead of an aggressive imposition of baseball over traditional Asian sports.

The international dimensions of *Globish* – to use yet another label – might be responsible for a return to what has been termed *monolingualism* – one language only, an antonym to *multilingualism*. Against the background of European/international (cultural and linguistic) diversity, this failure to provide a unique solution to the many facets of the management of cultural diversity is predictable. The case of the Romanian language as a foreign language is even more illustrative for the unavoidable difficulties that language teachers meet when managing multicultural groups.

Romanian as a foreign language. A case study

Far from the engulfing proportions of English, which is, slowly but surely, becoming the most widely spread language in the world, Romanian is, for a number of students who have chosen to learn in our country, their *lingua franca*. We are not talking about the students who learn in our country in English, French or German - an option now more and more available for those interested, but about the ones who have chosen to attend courses in Romanian, have their exams in Romanian and learn the skills of their future profession in Romanian. For these students - and, maybe, more than for them, for us actually, their teachers - the language or preparatory year (anul pregătitor) is one of the most interesting experiences possible. This is the group of people for which, in this period from their life, Romanian becomes, step by step, *lingua franca*. For the teacher, the 'last step' of this process is considered taken when he/ she notices that the students from different countries, with different mother tongues, but united, initially, by a more or less approximate English, get from having their break conversations in this 'universal' English to having them in Romanian. Of course, we cannot speak of perfectly accurate Romanian. However, exactly the fact that they 'dare' to use the new language, that they 'trust' it for their out of class conversations, being aware of the fact that they do not speak it very well yet, is extremely significant.

The language year is an extremely difficult and demanding period for the students, who start school with zero level in Romanian. In the Department of Romanian Language, Culture and Civilisation (the department of Romanian as a foreign language) from Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, the first semester is dedicated to general Romanian (five hours per day, every day of the week, except weekends), period in which the students have to assimilate the knowledge corresponding to levels A1 and A2 (according to the CEFR - The Common European Framework of Reference). In the second semester, they study three days general Romanian (at the end of this semester, the students would have assimilated the knowledge specific to B1 and B2 levels), one day - specialised language and one day they attend a course of Romanian cultural identity.

Romanian as a foreign language has been taught in our University for more than thirty five years, with differences from one year to the next, resulting from the number of students, the countries they have come from and the mother tongues they have spoken, and also from the syllabus they have been 'subjected to'. A comparably long tradition in teaching Romanian as a foreign language is registered in other universities in our country (Bucharest, Iaşi, Craiova, Constanţa etc.). However, what all these programmes of study lack in an almost equal measure is a thorough study, whose

purpose would be the analysis of the students' needs: a very thorough needs analysis[5]. This affects, first of all, the preparation of the students for the universities they attend the following year, but it has some consequences over the courses of general Romanian also.

If we were to get back to the concepts defined and detailed in the first part of this paper, this is the place where we could see them manifesting. In a group of students learning in the language year, we will find a true mixture of plurilingualism, multilingualism, pluriculturalism and interculturality.

Thus, plurilingualism is defined as the ability to use two or more languages. Most of our students are able to do that, even if the second language they speak is not used perfectly. This helps to learning Romanian, even if that language is not very similar to our language. Any language that is known by the student helps in the process of acquisition of a new one. The advantage coming from this knowledge is noticeable when the students who understand a word or a notion in the target language make the effort of explaining it to the less perceptive colleagues of the same mother tongue, or of a different mother tongue - case in which, sometimes, the three languages involved meet, conflict and struggle, with the hoped for result of understanding and learning.

Since we do not have the possibility to organise students in groups according to their mother tongue (anyway, we do not consider this necessarily the best method of work), multilingualism (the presence of more languages in the same geographical area) is 'at home' in our groups. The classroom is the 'geographical area', while the languages copresent can vary from Japanese or Arabic, to Albanian, English or Swedish. Of course, the teacher's purpose is to bring all of them in the second plane, in favour of Romanian. However, the landscape is extremely interesting and getting back in class after the break, we can sometimes find the blackboard full of Chinese, Arabic or Russian letters and words, since the students are frequently curious about each other's mother tongues. It is a curiosity that we, the teachers, often share - a thing which, I consider, is really good, since the joy and pride of the student showing the teacher how to write letters or words in his/ her language or indicating words that are very similar in the two languages are obvious. It is, among many others, one of the ways of valuing multilingualism and also of encouraging the students in the process of learning Romanian.

Pluriculturalism, defined as identification with two or more cultural groups, reveals itself in our groups in a variety of forms. Differences, but also similarities between cultures are identified, discussed and valued by students. This is one of the most fascinating and, at the same time, one of the most difficult to tackle with aspects that we meet in our activity. The differences that we encounter and are able to identify in and between our students do not come only from the variety of mother tongues, but also from the educational background that they are defined by and according to which they have been shaped until the moment they begin their studies in Romania. Again, I regret the lack of bibliography (or its scarcity), bibliography that could enlighten us concerning the difficulties and misunderstandings that might appear in the process of teaching/ learning due to educational and/ or cultural differences. It is a matter that has not been very widely treated by the specialists. However, one of the most firm points of view was expressed by Gerard Sharpling, who analysed the inter-cultural issues that could appear in testing Chinese learners. His article from 2004 is dedicated to the analysis of the written productions of the students who apply for academic studies in the UK. Ignoring the cultural specificity of a group of students could lead to misinterpretation of

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5   The lack of such an essential instrument for the teaching activity, especially when a language is taught, is notified, together with its consequences, by Ahmad Kandil, with reference to the process of teaching English in the Arab countries (Kandil, A. (2002). Needs analysis and the Arab learners. *TESOL Arabia*, Retrieved January 2012 from http://ilearn.20m. com/research/needs.htm). The lack of input with which the teachers start their activity leads to students' impossibility of deciding the University they would attend, since their admission depends almost entirely on the results they obtain in the English test they take when they finish their secondary education. This problem is equally determined by the lack of balance (and of fairness, in the end) that marks these final exams as concerned with the degree of difficulty present in the tests in different years. Fortunately, this is a problem that does not mark our exams any longer. We have adapted the exams our students take to the CEFR and the related documents and have equalised, consequently, the level of difficulty present in the exams in different years. However, the problem of the needs analysis remains and it affects mainly the courses of specialised language which are taught in the second semester. In this matter, our students meet the Arab ones, in a fault which makes their work and the teachers', equally, a difficult and, sometimes, confusing one. I will mention, in the end, that Kandil's paper seemed relevant to me not only due to its valuable information, but also because a considerable number of our students come from Arab countries.

their productions, to inaccurate marking and, consequently, to unfairness in their evaluation. One of the particularities that Sharpling indicates is this: „*It often seems to come as a shock to British academics to realise that the pursuit of original thinking, so widely cherished in their own system, is not necessarily shared or valued by other cultures*" (Sharpling, 2004: 69). He indicates, consequently, the constraints facing candidates who tackle proficiency tests in English: 1) „*Academic procedures and practices can shape students' responses into typecast or predictable patterns of thought*". 2) „*There is a relative reticence on the part of the students to express ideas that are imaginative, emotive, and which have individual specificity*" (Sharpling, 2004: 69). These constraints come from a very particular way of thinking, specific to the students' culture and traditions. If this peculiarity should be carefully considered and taken into consideration when written productions are evaluated or if it should rather be sanctioned and students prepared for the way of writing that they would have to face once they start their studies in an English language country is a different and quite long discussion, which will not be started here.

An equally - if not more - interesting aspect comes, of course, from the cultural differences that characterise every student in particular. Different traditions, different ways of thinking, and, naturally, different modalities of understanding the world make some things difficult to understand. A very nice example comes from Kandil's article (Kandil, 2002: 5), revealing the Arabian students' surprise when they discovered that "a rainy day is negatively referred to in the imported [English] text as a bad/terrible/horrible day".

Interculturality is, again, unavoidable in a multilingual group. Of course, there is no reason to avoid it in such a context (or in any other). Interculturality involves interaction, communication between people coming from different cultures, and communication is one of the components vital in the process of teaching/ learning. If a student sees interest from the others in his/ her culture and traditions, he/ she will be very tempted to share information, to speak about his/ her country, and the teacher can use this tendency in order to develop the student's abilities to communicate in the target language. All the aspects detailed in this last part of the paper, illustrating the case of teaching Romanian and/or English as a foreign language, can be used in studies preoccupied with cultural diversity in internationalised master groups.

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