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# ТІЛ МЕН ӘДЕБИЕТТІ ОҚЫТУ ӘДІСТЕМЕСІ МЕТОДИКА ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ ЯЗЫКА И ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ

UDC 811.512.122

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## **Communicative Competence «Revisited». Teachability and Learnability of Non-Verbal Communication in ELT**

Theory and practice go hand in hand, with theory serving as the groundwork for practice, which in turn refines, evidences and reinforces the former. The main objective of this paper was not so much proving the suitability or inadequacy of one or the other theory or model, instead, we hoped to offer new interpretations of certain theories as applied in classroom practice. The paper focuses on the teachability and learnability of non-verbal communication within the framework of intercultural communication in the course of language teacher training programmes in institutions of higher education.

*Key words:* code, non-verbal elements, non-verbal communication, intercultural communication, English language, teachers of a foreign language.

### *Introduction*

There have been no lack of students learning a foreign language who due to their limited linguistic command find it difficult to communicate on the particular language they learn. It was long before another aspect of the same problem started to baffle them, namely the non-verbal signals accompanying, complementing or substituting linguistic performance.

Being one of the members of the EU, under the umbrella of which multicultural and multiethnic societies live together, it is worth making the effort and consider the Union's guiding principles for setting the framework for education, notably regarding people as individuals while at the same time the cohesive feeling of community and the values of multiculturalism are observed, too. This implies also that language learning and teaching should be about a lot more than just providing information, it should also convey a sense of cultural and social openness (Goulding, 1995). What we had in mind when we set out to design our curriculum was the picture of a student equipped with all possible verbal and non-verbal instruments and able to communicate effectively outside the classroom environment (cf. Nunan 1988).

Having intensely dwelt on the issue, we soon realised that going thoroughly into the problem requires a balanced, interdisciplinary approach. We do not wish to prompt accusations linguists are so often faced with, namely specialising in such a small segment of a field of research they ignore the complexity of the system and subsequently fail to keep an eye on what is going on in it.

Theory and practice go hand in hand, with theory serving as the groundwork for practice, which in turn refines, evidences and reinforces the former. The main objective of this paper was not so much proving the suitability or inadequacy of one or the other theory or model, instead, we hoped to offer new interpretations of certain theories as applied in classroom practice.

The topic of our paper had to be narrowed down for several reasons. Firstly, because we thought it is necessary to forge a union of theory and practice. Secondly, because we would like to avoid committing the mistake of inter- and intradisciplinary separatism and thirdly, because our lives are interwoven both by verbal and non-verbal dimensions of communication, a «goldmine» for those interested in this field.

The fact that no attempt for a comprehensive examination of non-verbal communication from the point of view of language teaching has been made so far is accounted for by Munby (1997:30) as follows. Apart from very briefly touching on the question of non-verbal code, he did not intend to elaborate on the extralinguistic knowledge entailed by communicative competence, saying that its in-depth exploration would require research beyond the scope of his work. This opinion is all too familiar to us and our interest was aroused exactly by remarks like his, which exclude non-verbal aspects from the focal point of research. We do not wish to narrow non-verbal communication down to language teaching and teacher training by saying that non-verbal elements add colour and merely enrich communication. Certainly, they are integral and essential parts of interaction.

The paper focuses on the teachability and learnability of non-verbal communication within the framework of intercultural communication (cf. Sciacovelli 2011) in the course of language teacher training programmes in institutions of higher education.

The paper discusses in detail in what way speech, particularly informal conversation between Hungarian and native speakers of English and non-verbal communicative elements of the conversation are interrelated, and to what extent the latter are affected by the non-verbal knowledge of speakers of the foreign language about their native and the target language. We explore in depth how and to what extent non-verbal elements of communication employed via different channels of communication are culturally bound to the mother tongue of the speaker. Our attempt to offer an answer to the question whether or not non-verbal dimensions of the target language can be taught in the course of language learning was motivated by the immediate pedagogical need to know whether or not it is possible to learn or acquire these non-verbal elements of communication within a classroom environment resulting in the ability to reproduce or merely to recognise them.

#### *Theoretical layout*

It is almost a banal cliché to say that the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the age of communication and few would disagree that the same goes for the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is this age that highlights the importance of teaching languages especially if it is a lingua franca like the English language.

Noam Chomsky was the first to establish competence as a linguistic concept in its own rights (Chomsky, 1965). The very idea of distinguishing between competence and performance had far-reaching effects both on linguistic theory and on the theory and practice of teaching and learning languages. The task to set competence as it was understood by Chomsky into the framework of communicative competence sparked profound theoretical and practical work amongst applied linguists and language educators alike.

Since one of its special components, namely the non-verbal aspects of communicative competence has hitherto been relatively untapped by researchers, we set out to investigate whether or not students learning English as their L2 can fully or only partly acquire non-verbal communicative competence.

The need to distinguish between communicative competence in the native and the L2 seems justified by the constant occurrence of communicative problems in the course of an interaction between such partners.

It is of paramount importance for teachers of a foreign language not to have a unifacial linguistic competence restricted to verbal skills only, but to possess at least receptive but preferably productive communication skills in order to be able to effectively apply their sociocultural knowledge to the target language. As communicative competence is a characteristic feature of both native and non-native speakers, we needed a model of communicative competence providing for both of them by considering the whole spectrum of a language usage including the context and the situation in which the interaction is embedded.

The original, Chomskian scope of language competence claimed that the essence of linguistic competence lies in the ability of the speaker to generate an unlimited number sentences/utterances from a limited number of words and a limited number of rules. This stipulation, however, proved far too narrow for scientists researching L2 acquisition.

The 1970s saw the emergence of ideas and theories on the basis of which the knowledge of a language can be broken down into its elements, notably into competences other than linguistic competence. More recent models of communicative competence include the knowledge of language functions, sociolinguistic and sociocultural knowledge.

The Hymesian (1971, 1972, 1985) model was the first to consider the significance of the context behind the sentence, including both the text and the sociocultural situation, which in turn fundamentally determines the nature and function of the text, including non-verbal elements of communication as well. The feature shared by the Hymesian and the subsequent models is that all of them is composed of more than one compo-

nents. Hymes distinguished two of these features, Canale-Swain (1980) proposed a model stipulating three components while Canale (1983) identified four such elements. Bachmann et al. (1986) composed a multi-component edifice. We opted for the four/component model suggested by Canale-Swain in 1983 to provide the groundwork and the framework of our investigation of communicative competence. Bachman's model forms the rudiments of testing as it had been intended by the author. Celce-Murcia-Dörnyei-Thurell (1995) constructed their model for practical, classroom purposes, which implies their conclusion that no theoretical model can be an absolute remedy for all classroom troubles as they have to be adapted to the actual needs of that particular group of students. Therefore we think it is not a hasty conclusion to draw that any model of communicative competence can only be a framework within which it is possible to draw up a feasible language curriculum.

*The Szombathely programme, its examination and subsequent results*

We can sum up and synthesize the results of our eight-year research carried out at the Szombathely Berzsényi College on what had already been anticipated by György Szépe's study (1979), on inter-ethnicity in view of the interrelated nature of communication and situation.

It dawns onto more and more advanced students of a language that despite achieving a rather high level of verbal performance they are often unable to understand their partners' intentions irrespective of the partner being a native or a non-native speaker of the language. Students experiencing such hitches now seem to realise that this is caused by their insufficient or total lack of knowledge of the communication habits of their partners.

Our assumption that the knowledge of only one the several communication channels only considerably hinders or altogether prevents effective communication in a foreign language seems therefore justified. No matter how proficient the speaker otherwise may be, having even a near-native linguistic command of the language the communication is in all likelihood doomed to failure without the ability to decipher at least a fair number of elements of non-verbal communication in the target language.

We may conclude that it is the deficient knowledge of the culture specific non-verbal elements of communication that leads to the breakdown of communication.

Besides enhancing the linguistic command of the students introducing them to the culture of the target language is a must for all language teacher training programmes. It is beyond dispute that these two components, linguistic and cultural aspects are inseparable as without the in-depth knowledge of culture, linguistic competence is «a sterile reproduction of sounds» (Russo, 1983:105) far from a sound comprehension of a modern language and a contemporary culture.

When designing the syllabi for our language teacher training programme one of the objectives we had in mind was to enable our students to avoid such traps of communication by being able to recognise and tackle them. Another major objective we set was to raise students' awareness of the need to consciously interpret non-verbal signals employed in the course of an interaction to accompany and/or to substitute verbal elements.

Thus, students would not misinterpret or misunderstand the culturally varying elements in non-verbal communication in the course of a cross-cultural interaction which, as a complex, multi-level, multi-channel process, involves partners equipped with different sets of non-verbal cultural signals. Language itself is not the only medium of communication, therefore effective and successful cross-cultural communication heavily depends partly on the ability of the participants' to integrate such multi-level, multi-channel signals and partly on their knowledge of non-verbal elements and on how well the partners are able to recognise them. We can provide our students with necessary information noting at the same time that communication as a multi-channelled process with its verbal and non-verbal signals is always subject to the influence of the culture of the community using the language.

The 1970s saw the emergence of the necessity that language learners should be able to deliver a culturally authentic and socially acceptable linguistic performance, that is to demonstrate a communicative usage of the language. New ways how to teach social interaction were pointed out and their importance was highlighted from the 1980s on by numerous authors involved in language learning including Wright (1980), Richard-Amato (1988), Stevick (1989), Cook (1989) and Nunan (1989) just to name but a few.

Furthermore, we also had to consider the fact that in communication the linguistic code is limited in the sense that the speaker may have a wide range of verbal choice at his disposal but his choice in the case of non-verbal elements accompanying and/or partly substituting the verbal ones is often made impossible by the simple fact that the speaker does have them at his fingertips, ready to use. A deficient or missing inventory of

such non-verbal elements prevents the partner from interpreting and decoding the intended message and as a result the interaction fails.

Although we do not wish to question the importance of verbal competencies where students' development can be more accurately tested, we emphasize and intend to show the significance and the need of establishing and developing non-verbal communicative competence in classroom environment as pointed out in Di Pietro (1987).

In response to new challenges and problems that have emerged in language teacher training and also considering the shift in the focus of teacher training in 1992 the BDF Department of English Language and Literature revised its curriculum introduced previously. We do not intend to elaborate on the contents of the complete curriculum, the paper describes the course on non-verbal communication only and presents an analysis of the outcome of our investigation. We attached great importance to bring our curriculum, particularly its non-verbal components in line with the contemporary trend that started to make its influence felt from the 1980s on and which can be characterised by a considerable approximation and eventual overlap between linguistics, information and communication sciences. A shift in the conception of what culture means coincided with the former process. Cultural pluralism has become the buzzword replacing the notion of the «melting pot» and placing the idea of cultures living side by side, retaining their national identities by preserving their unique traditions in pivotal position. (cf. Valverde, 1993)

Designing, developing and implementing our programme required us to maintain a balanced interdisciplinary approach, keeping in mind that it had to be apt for classroom application. During this procedure we considered both domestic and international experience available at the time. Having launched the programme we were soon faced with the enormous complexity of the task to instruct an interdisciplinary subject area parallel with teaching language skills or delivering lectures on the theoretical background. Enthusiastic and committed as we were, we knew it would have been a fallacy to assume the possibility of acculturation in the classroom, leading eventually to acquiring social and cultural norms and rules, with other words to the students' integration into the target society. However, neither the given classroom environment, nor the time allocated for the course or the whole programme was adequate or suitable for this purpose. All data and evidence from the survey seemed to suggest the same bottom line, namely that all we can achieve is to make our students comprehend the complexity of the multichannelled process of communication and enable them to anticipate what an interaction with native or non-native speakers of the language, whose minds are furnished with culturally bound means of non-verbal communication, might bring. Under the given circumstances it did not prove feasible to teach our students how to (re) produce cultural differences in terms of kinesic behaviour, proxemics, etc. although we can help them develop the capacity to recognise and decode non-verbal elements of cross-cultural communication.

We are well aware how limited our facilities are and also that we are not in a position to ensure training in an English-speaking country for each student. Nevertheless, we are in a position to considerably contribute to and advocate the establishment and development of skills and competences necessary to a successful interaction as our linguistic courses substantially facilitate the establishment of syntactically, semantically and paralinguistically correct verbal competences.

With the English language becoming the lingua franca of the world the question naturally rises whether or not the communicative competence of native speakers is sufficient to ensure smooth interaction with non-native speakers of the language. The answer is at present a definite no, because few native speakers have realised thus far that effective cross-cultural communication requires also their readiness to learn. We must certainly agree that non-native speakers of the language have to be prepared how to communicate effectively in English both with native and other non-native speakers. It seems reasonable and warranted to assume that it is equally important to be able to communicate effectively with native and non-native speakers alike who have English as their L2.

Our examination stipulates as its starting point that alongside with establishing communicative competence, teaching and learning non-verbal communication is an integral part of cultural studies. Thus our students will be culturally enriched, their horizon is broadened, acquire skills and relish experience which in turn will indirectly enable them to achieve high standards in their future teaching career and demonstrate effective interpersonal skills, too. Our programme does not expect the students to give up their cultural identity but facilitates a conscious knowledge and interpretation of a system of non-verbal communicative elements different from their own, although decoding is not always possible due to the lack of necessary background knowledge.

Given the current didactic practices, communication studies are not in the forefront of many language teacher training programmes and as part of these studies the subject area of non-verbal communication is rarely on offer as a course in its own rights.

These days foreign language teaching focuses on the development of verbal communication skills, either pushing non-verbal dimensions into the background or ignoring them altogether. Our main concern was to find out whether or not the non-verbal communication system of the target language can be internalised or what we can do to raise our students' awareness of the major and often decisive role elements of non-verbal communicative competence play in effective interaction serving as cornerstones of communication.

Considering that our students are to be non-native teachers of English, it is not difficult to see that employing non-verbal communicative elements as well will boost the efficiency of their future classroom management. Also given the fact that 80 % of all forms of communication accounts for non-verbal communication in any language there is no way that a responsible ELT teacher trainer can ignore such a substantial part of L2 acquisition.

Research conducted in educational context is different from a standard research and its subject material in that its participants function both as the sources and targets of the examination.

Although we had a wide variety of choices when selecting the decisive factors for our survey from the available theories and making advantage of our own situation, this proved a demanding and challenging task. When formulating our hypothesis we turned to our experience gained from looking into the acquisition of the native language and separately considered the acquisition/learning of L2 in a classroom environment.

Only students having spent a considerable period of time in an English-speaking country demonstrated adequate and productive non-verbal communicative competence while the majority of students hardly showed signs of even receptive communicative competence. Students with sufficient and effective communicative competence are in an absolute minority as opposed to students, definitely more in number, with the ability to recognise only elements of non-verbal communicative competence, which receptive ability varies in terms of socio-linguistic and strategic competence as well.

The outcome of our survey reinforced us in our belief that from a practical point of view it is definitely worth making the effort to carry on with the investigations while acknowledging that there is room for further research.

As Buda (1998) very aptly puts it, communication is an endless and inconsumable resource for research providing starting points for future projects. All research hitherto seems to boil down the same conclusion, namely that non-verbal communication is impossible to acquire without having lived in a target language country for a considerable period of time since it is so much enriched by (cross-) cultural aspects that the outcome is always highly variable and requires first hand experience of the target language community.

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**Коммуникативтік құзыреттілік түсінігіне жаңа көзқарас.  
Ағылшын тілін шетел тілі ретінде оқыту барысында бейвербалды  
коммуникация құралдарын үйрету және меңгерту**

Мақалада венгр аудиториясында ағылшын тілін оқыту барысында қолданылатын бейвербалды (тілдік емес) қарым-қатынас құралдарының рөлі қарастырылды. Венгр және ағылшын мәдениетіндегі бейвербалдық элементтердің (компоненттердің) типологиялық сипатына ерекше көңіл бөлінді. Лингводидактика бойынша студенттерге шетел тілін үйрету кезінде мәдениетаралық қарым-қатынас мәселелері басқаша қарастырылды. Сондықтан қазіргі уақытта шетел тілін оқыту кезінде бейвербалды (тілдік емес) қарым-қатынас мәселелерін қайтадан қарастыру қажеттілігі туындады.

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**Новый подход к трактовке коммуникативной компетенции.  
Преподавание и овладение нон-вербальной коммуникацией  
в процессе изучения английского языка как иностранного**

В статье автором исследована роль невербальных коммуникативных компонентов при изучении венграми английского языка, особое внимание уделено типологическим свойствам невербальных компонентов в венгерской и англоязычной культуре. Вопросы межкультурной коммуникации при обучении студентов иностранному языку по-разному осмысливаются в лингводидактике. На сегодняшний день назрела необходимость осмысления проблемы невербальной коммуникации при изучении иностранного языка.