



Impact of Intercultural Communication Apprehension upon Students' Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence Development

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Abstract

Efficient communication is the basis for person's satisfaction with mutually beneficial relationships in personal, academic and professional fields. To be efficient in today's global cross-cultural encounters citizens need plurilingual and pluricultural communicative competences. However, students who aim at developing their plurilingual competences at higher education institutions often exhibit communication apprehension, fear of speaking, anxiety of public speaking, are afraid of communication breakdowns, miscommunication and failure in general and, thus, face difficulties in using foreign languages in real life situations. The study aimed, first, at identifying the level of intercultural communication apprehension as a possible hindrance to efficient plurilingual competence development and, second, to find out if conscious and planned attention to affective domain during the language learning classes can assist language learners in developing their higher self-confidence and defeat of fear, thus ensuring the development of plurilingual and pluricultural communication skills which, consequently, leading to more successful communication. The study used quantitative and qualitative research methods. Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) [18] and Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA) [19] were employed to identify the level of students' general and intercultural communication apprehension. The research respondents (n=114) were students of English for Intercultural Communication (C1 level [11]) who studied the course in 2018-2020. A model of ADM activities was created and implemented in the course, which provided promising results in favor of explicit communication apprehension defeat training during the language classes. The conclusion is drawn that recognition of communication apprehension as a natural human feature which can be managed and explicit training in how to deal with communication breakdowns can lead to more successful acquisition of plurilingual and pluricultural competences.

Keywords: *Plurilingual and pluricultural competences, intercultural communication apprehension, affective domain, affective domain management.*

1. Introduction

Intercultural communication (hereinafter, IC) has become a necessity for contemporary people living in the globalized world; thus, good communication skills in general and proper IC skills in particular have become indispensable [9], [10]. However, not all people feel confident and empowered to face these challenges as to become a good communicator internationally-wise requires a lot of practice and experience. Consequently, insufficient acquisition of communication skills might cause unwanted communication breakdowns, miscommunication and failed communication in general, which may be accompanied with the feelings of tension, situation anxiety and stress. Therefore, the study aimed at determining the level of students' IC apprehension, seeing it to be the hindrance for efficient plurilingual competence acquisition and development, and finding out if conscious and planned attention to affective domain during the language learning classes can assist language learners in developing their higher self-confidence and defeat of fear, and, thus, lead to more successful communicative practices.

2. Literature review

The affective domain, referred to since Socrates, Platos and Aristotle's times [2], taken into account in Dewey's progressive education movement, Montessori 's education theories, Maslow's humanistic psychology, and Roger's humanistic approaches to education [22], gained grounds in scientific studies throughout the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, since its inclusion in Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives in 1950s [6], and a more specific taxonomy of objectives of affective domain a decade later [15]. Affective filter hypothesis [14], recognition that "affection and cognition are complementary and cannot be developed independently during the learning process" [21] and call for integrative approach [3] have led to numerous studies which indicate the importance of attention to affective factors in language learning. The researchers [2], [7] [23] conceptualize the



affective domain as the emotional side of human behaviour which can be juxtaposed to the cognitive side. The concept of *affective domain* is used here to mean feelings while studying the language, emotions, and attitudes towards the language and studying experienced during the language learning or, using the CEFR concept, *plurilingual competence* acquisition and development, i.e. “the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/learner [11].

Communication apprehension (hereinafter, CA) was originally conceptualized in 1970 as anxiety related to oral communication and later modified as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” [17, p. 78]. Thus CA was first understood as a trait characteristic related to a person’s temperament, “a learned trait”, explained by “learned helplessness” theory [4, p. 219]. Researchers [4], [7], [12], [14], [18] recognize that language anxiety or apprehension occur when people are expected to perform in the target language. *Intercultural communication apprehension* (hereinafter, ICA) was conceptualised by researchers [5] as “the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated interaction with people of different groups, especially cultural and ethnic and/or racial groups” [21, p. 146]. In this study, ICA will be defined as fear, tension, lack of self-confidence and anxiety in relation to real or anticipated communication with other people individually or in group discussions, speaking in front of the audience in monolingual as well as multilingual and multicultural group.

2. Methods

2.1 Research aim and objectives

The **aim** of the study was to identify the effect of affective factors upon students’ plurilingual competence development. The objectives were set to identify the students’ level of general CA and ICA and to create and implement a model of Affective Domain Management (hereinafter, ADM) to find out if conscious attention to CA can assist students in language learning.

2.2 Participants

A non-probability convenience **sampling** was chosen for the research as the research respondents (n=114) were the students of English for IC (C1 level, according to [11]) who studied the course in 2018-2019. 63% of the research participants were females and 37% males; 89% were Lithuanians and 11% were visiting students from 5 countries (Italy, Hong Kong, Kazahstan, Spain and Portugal). As only 9.6% of the students were from outside Lithuania, no country comparisons have been made.

2.3 Instruments and procedures

The study used quantitative (four surveys) and qualitative (analysis of narratives) research methods (due to the article volume constraints, only quantitative data will be analysed). Two research instruments were designed: *Initial questionnaire*, to identify the students’ expectations and possible worries regarding oral participation, and *the exit questionnaire*, to identify the students’ opinion on the impact of ADM on the course learning outcomes. Two other research **instruments** - *Personal Report of CA* (PRCA-24) [20] and *Personal Report of ICA* (PRICA) [21], which focused on determining person’s CA in group discussions (hereinafter, GD), participation in meetings & lecture discussions (M&LD) and giving a public speech/ presentation (PP) were employed to identify the level of students’ CA and ICA [6]. Apart from the questionnaire surveys, a model of ADM, consisting of five categories (receiving, responding, valuing, organizing and characterizing) of affective domain, as discerned by Bloom [6], was constructed and implemented, seeking to determine if conscious and planned attention to affective domain (feelings, emotions, and attitudes) during the language learning classes can assist students in reducing their CA, which, consequently leads to more efficient communication.

3. Research findings

3.1 Communication apprehension experienced during language learning

For this study, CA in three areas of classroom work will be analyzed: CA caused by or due to participating in GD, M&LD and giving a PP, as these are the most frequent areas related to uncertainty and found be researchers to cause CA [1], [2], [3], [9], [10], [19]. First, it was identified that students’ level of CA while **participating in GD** is moderate: over half of them like getting involved in GD (62%), being engaged and feel generally comfortable (both 57%) and two fifths (43%) admitted feeling tense and nervous in GD in general. More than half of the respondents, engaging in GD with *new* people felt tension and nervousness. Analysing the results of PRICA on the same issue it is



evident that students are more likely to get involved in GD with others who are from different cultures (18.5% strongly agreed and 51.9% agreed). Yet even two thirds of them (74.6%) admitted getting nervous while participating in GD with a foreigner and agreed (73.5%) having a fear of speaking up. Second, the analysis of the level of CA experienced due to **participation in M&LD** shows that the level of students' CA was almost equally distributed in two dichotomous ways: half of the students (48%) agreed that they were usually calm and relaxed, and almost the other half (43%) admitted not being calm and relaxed while participating in M&LD. It is interesting to note that even 62% of them admitted feeling not very calm and relaxed when they were called upon to express their opinion in a M&LD and only each fifth was calm and relaxed in this situation. In addition, one out of three respondents were afraid to express themselves and even 43% were not relaxed when they had to answer questions in M&LD.

Third, identifying the level of CA while **giving a PP**, which is a usual assignment in advanced language level classrooms, almost three out of four students admitted that even if they expect to give a speech with confidence (71%), "certain parts of their body feel very tense and rigid while I am giving a speech" (71%), they have fear and cannot relax (67% both), for 43% of them their thoughts become confused and jumbled (see Fig. 1). Each third felt getting so nervous that they tended to forget the facts they really knew. Taking into account that presenting a public speech is part of the mandatory activities of any advanced language class, it is possible to state that having high CA can have a serious impact upon the students' language competence development.

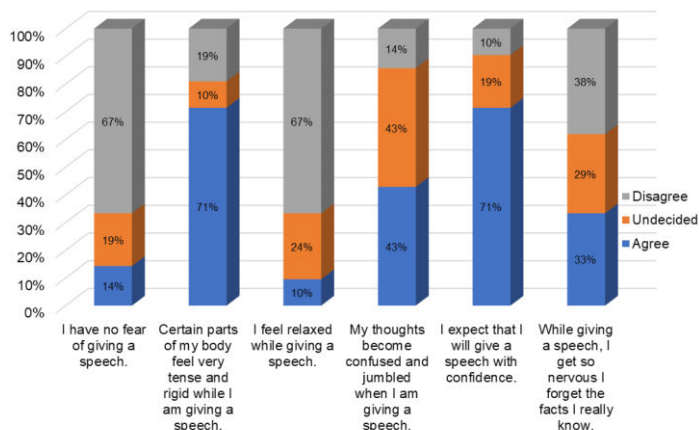


Fig. 1. Communication apprehension while giving a speech / presentation

The analysis of the PRICA results revealed that more than half of the respondents (58.8%) exhibited a moderate level of anxiety; whereas 28.9% of the respondents scored lower than 33 with each tenth between 17-20. Only 14, i.e. 12.3% of the respondents appeared to have a very high level of ICA, between 62-64. According to the authors of PRICA [20], as the scores may range from 14 to 70, a score above 52 indicates a "high" level of ICA, while a score below 32 shows low anxiety. A person with a moderate level of anxiety in intercultural situations will score between 32-52.

3.2 Affective domain management model

To determine if conscious and planned attention to affective domain (feelings, emotions, and attitudes) during the English language and IC classes can assist students in reducing their CA and developing their higher self-confidence, necessary in (intercultural) communication, a model of ADM was created on the basis of Bloom's taxonomy of affective domain [6], [8], [21] and integrated in the regular English for IC (C1 level) classes. The model employed five categories (receiving, responding, valuing, organizing and characterizing) of the affective domain, and included activities provided for students in class and outside the class, on their own. The focus was on raising students' awareness about ADM, helping them to gain efficient ADM skills and expecting that acquisition of these skills. It is expected that the skills gained through the integration of ADM skills will further assist them in becoming more active language learners and users and will allow them to gain fluent and accurate plurilingual and pluricultural communication skills that will, consequently, lead to more successful IC.



3.3 Exit evaluation of student ADM

Having undergone the training into the ADM during the regular courses of English for IC classes, the students filled in the course exit questionnaire to identify their satisfaction with class atmosphere, class organization and impact of ADM activities upon their CA. The absolute majority of the students were satisfied with the positive and non-threatening classroom atmosphere created in the language learning class and admitted being encouraged and motivated to learn the language and ADM. Students were also content with class activities, agreeing that they were meaningful (79%). Researching the emotional dispositions students had in learning the language in this class, it was found out that students exhibited rather positive emotions (see Fig. 2), they enjoyed studying the language in the current class (77%) and found language learning an enjoyable activity because they could observe the progress they were making (73%).

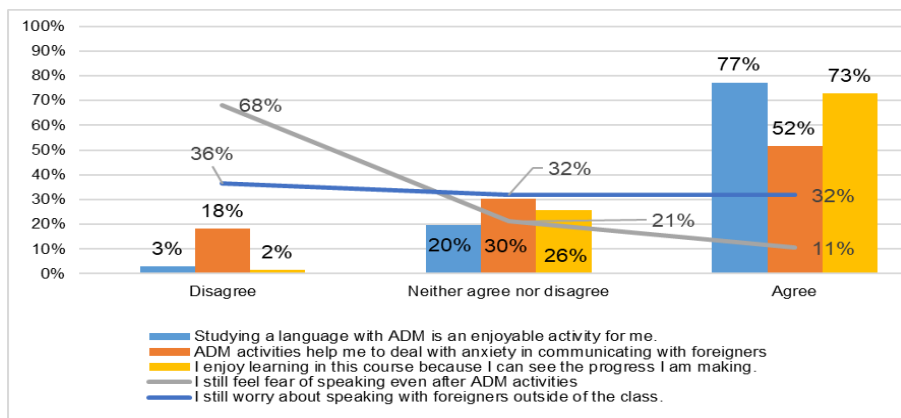


Fig. 2. Students' assessed impact of ADM activities upon communication apprehension

Over half of the respondents agreed that ADM activities help them to deal with anxiety in real target language use situations. The statement inquiring if the research respondents worried when they had a chance to speak outside the class yielded almost equal distribution of responses in all three categories of choice. As the results show, one tenth admitted still feeling fear of speaking even after the ADM treatment, but the majority admitted not feeling any fear (68%).

4. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the identified general level of students' CA in participating in GD, M&LD shows that the level of CA of the majority of the respondents is moderate, i.e. the students' attitude is rather positive as over half of them like getting involved in GD, being engaged and are generally comfortable while participating in GD, as they participate in familiar environment with the people they already know. However, engaging in group discussions with new people, more than each second of the respondents felt tension and nervousness. Another interesting insight obtained from PRICA results was that being advanced users of the English language, the respondents have intentions to use the language in practical IC situations (they like participating in GD with people from other countries), but the overwhelming majority still felt nervous and had fear of speaking which leads to the conclusion that they need to work on and learn ADM skills. Next, the data of research into CA in M&LD were equally distributed in two directions: half of the students admitted feeling calm and relaxed, and a slightly lower number of the respondents felt CA. It is interesting to note that the majority admitted feeling not very calm and relaxed when they were to participate in M&LD not on a voluntary basis, but being called upon to express their opinion.

Furthermore, the implemented model of ADM, which consisted of open discussions and inter-cultural communication awareness raising exercises, and the students' assessment of its implementation allow to conclude that recognition of CA as a natural human feature, which can be overcome, and explicit teaching on how to defeat its breakdowns can lead to higher motivation and learning satisfaction of language learners and more successful intercultural communication, consequently, to plurilingual and intercultural competence acquisition and development.

However, further research is needed to identify the impact of ICA and correlation between other factors, such as students cross-cultural experience, personality factors (inhibition, risk-taking, temperament), language achievement and others.



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