

TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR DEVELOPING EFL LEARNERS'
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract. The article discusses the potential of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) as a means of developing intercultural communicative competence in EFL learners. Based on the concept of the "third place" and the intercultural learning cycle of noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting, it shows how pedagogical tasks derived from real-world intercultural situations can integrate culture into language lessons. Ethnographic, project, virtual exchange and pragmatic tasks are described, and the conditions for their successful use in the Uzbek EFL context are outlined.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, task-based language teaching, third place, intercultural learning cycle, target tasks, virtual exchange, EFL.

The reform of foreign language education in Uzbekistan over the last decade has placed communicative competence at the centre of English language curricula. Graduates are expected not only to read and write in English but to work in international teams, study abroad and represent their country in professional and academic settings. Yet a learner who can construct grammatically correct sentences may still fail in a real conversation with a Japanese colleague, a German professor or a Brazilian business partner. Such failures are rarely caused by vocabulary gaps; far more often they result from unfamiliar expectations about how to greet, refuse, disagree, give compliments or show respect. This shows that language and culture cannot be separated in teaching, and that the classroom must prepare learners for communication across cultural boundaries. The purpose of the present thesis is to show how Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can serve as an effective vehicle for building EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and to propose principles for designing intercultural tasks.

Kramersch (1993) argued that culture in the language classroom should not be treated as a fifth skill added to listening, speaking, reading and writing, but as a constant background present from the very first lesson. In her view, learners who study a foreign language gradually create a "third place", a space between their native culture and the target culture from which they can view both with greater understanding. Developing on this idea, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) described intercultural language learning as a cyclical process consisting of noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting. Learners first notice cultural features in language use, then compare them with practices in their own culture, reflect on what these differences mean for them personally, and finally apply their new understanding in interaction. From this perspective, ICC is not a body of knowledge to be memorized but a capacity that develops through experience and conscious reflection.

This understanding of intercultural learning closely matches the principles of TBLT. Nunan (2004) distinguished between real-world tasks, which people perform in everyday life outside the classroom, and

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pedagogical tasks, which are classroom activities in which learners comprehend, manipulate, produce or interact in the target language while their attention is focused on meaning. Long (2015) further stressed that task-based courses should be built on a needs analysis identifying the target tasks learners will actually face. For contemporary EFL learners, many of these target tasks are inherently intercultural: writing an email to a foreign university, taking part in an online meeting with international colleagues, hosting a foreign delegation or resolving a misunderstanding with a customer from another country. Designing pedagogical tasks on the basis of such situations makes intercultural competence a natural outcome of language instruction rather than an optional supplement.

The cycle of noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting can be built directly into a task sequence. At the noticing stage, learners may watch short video clips of people from different cultures greeting each other, inviting a friend or apologising, and record what they observe about words, gestures, distance and tone. At the comparing stage, they work in pairs to describe how the same situations are handled in Uzbek culture, identifying similarities and differences. At the reflecting stage, learners discuss why these differences exist, which values they reflect and how they personally felt about unfamiliar behaviour. Finally, at the interacting stage, they apply their insights in a role-play or a simulation, for instance planning a cultural programme for foreign guests or negotiating a schedule with a partner whose attitude to time differs from their own.

Several types of tasks have proved especially valuable for this purpose. Ethnographic tasks turn learners into small-scale researchers who interview foreigners living in their city, exchange students or online partners about everyday customs, and then present their findings to the class. Project tasks, such as preparing a guide for international students arriving in Tashkent, require learners to anticipate the difficulties a newcomer may face and therefore to view their own culture through the eyes of an outsider. Virtual exchange tasks connect classes in different countries to complete a joint product, for example a bilingual presentation on youth traditions, which creates authentic need for negotiation and mutual explanation. Pragmatic tasks focus on speech acts such as requests and refusals, in which learners compare degrees of directness and politeness across cultures and practise choosing appropriate forms. All these tasks share an essential feature: cultural knowledge is not delivered by the teacher but discovered, interpreted and used by the learners themselves.

The successful use of TBLT for intercultural purposes depends on a number of conditions. The teacher's role changes from a source of cultural facts to a facilitator who poses questions, encourages comparison and helps learners avoid simplistic generalizations and stereotypes. Materials should reflect the diversity of English-speaking contexts, including users of English as a lingua franca, rather than focusing exclusively on Britain and the United States. Reflection should be treated as an integral phase of every task, supported by discussion, learning diaries or portfolios in which learners record critical moments of their intercultural experience. Assessment should take into account not only linguistic accuracy but also the appropriateness of language choices, the depth of comparison and the learner's willingness to consider alternative perspectives. Possible difficulties include limited class time, large groups and learners' initial resistance to discussing sensitive cultural topics, which can be reduced through careful sequencing of tasks from familiar to less familiar themes.

To sum up, intercultural communicative competence is now an inseparable part of what it means to know a foreign language. Learning about other cultures through isolated facts does not prepare EFL learners for the complexity of real intercultural encounters. TBLT, with its emphasis on meaningful

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outcomes, real-world target tasks and active learner participation, provides a practical way of integrating the cycle of noticing, comparing, reflecting and interacting into everyday language lessons. Ethnographic, project, virtual exchange and pragmatic tasks allow learners to discover cultural differences themselves, to reconsider their own cultural assumptions and to practise appropriate behaviour. Further classroom research in the Uzbek educational context, including the development of reliable instruments for assessing learners' ICC, would help to evaluate the effectiveness of intercultural task-based instruction more precisely.

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