**FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND CULTURAL AWARENESS - A *MUST* IN THE
EDUCATION OF THE 21ST CENTURY EUROPEAN MILITARY LEADERS****Marioara PATEȘAN*, Alina BALAGIU*, Dana ZECHIA*******“Nicolae Bălcescu” Land Forces Academy, Sibiu, Romania,******“Mircea cel Bătrân” Naval Academy, Constanța, Romania****mpatesan@yahoo.com, alinabalagiu@yahoo.com, dzechia@yahoo.com**

Motto: *“Keep your language. Love its sounds, its modulation, its rhythm.
But try to march together with men of different languages, remote from your own,
who wish like you for a more just and human world.”*
(Hélder Câmara*, *Spiral of Violence*)

Abstract: Europe is characterized by both geographical and cultural diversity. At present, the European countries are under deep transformations due to the migratory trends. These special events need measures not only at the political level but also at the military, social and economic one. By being aware and accepting all these changes, mainly the cultural ones, we have to be open and adapt ourselves to the new context in which we have to be able to accept that our existence with its norms, values, customs and traditions is not unique. The language competences contribute to the mobility, employability and personal development of its citizens, in particular, the young people. As far as the military environment is concerned, we believe that it is of utmost importance not only to speak a common language but also to know the culture of the partners we cooperate with, as well as that of the local populations from various theatres of operations. At the level of our institutions, we tried to integrate into the curriculum topics that help our students, future military leaders, to be ready to efficiently answer to the new changes that they will face in a new military environment. In our paper, we will highlight the ways we can promote the development of our learners’ linguistic and cultural competencies.

Keywords: cultural and linguistic competence, awareness, attitude, knowledge, skills

1. Introduction

Cultural and linguistic competence is a set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or among professionals that enables effective work in cross-cultural situations. When we say *cultural* and *linguistic competence* we imply language, communication ways, behaviors, customs, beliefs, values of different ethnic, religious and organizational groups. In order to properly function in cross cultural situations one

needs both cultural and linguistic competencies.

The educator must bring the attention upon the impact of cultural and linguistic diversity and bring to class topics of interest for the learners so as these should be aware of the differences in the possible interactions with international colleagues. When training and educating future professionals, we must stress the importance of these differences both culturally and linguistically as they will

have an impact on all aspects of future professional practices.

The educator should strive to make the learners aware of the beliefs and values unique to each individual, to make them understand and respect others without cultural biases, without false assumptions that might lead to awkward or even dangerous situations. They should know that some actions or gestures may be inappropriate and even offensive to other people.

As future military leaders, they should also realize that it is very important to be proficient in the language as in an operations theatre it is easier to find a local speaker of English, for example, than a suitable interpreter that could be used. Our learners must be able to speak at least one foreign language with a high level of proficiency in vocabulary, meaning, pronunciation, grammar, and usage and understand issues related to cultural and linguistic diversity.

2. The impact of cultural and linguistic competences

In the professional military environment, linguistic and cultural differences that influence the behavior and accomplishment of the missions are recognized. Besides being professionally competent a military should respect the values and customs of the representatives of the nations they share the mission with and recognize the differences among them. The difference should be made not by ethnicity, religion, language or speech, but by the skills and competencies they have as professional NATO members.

All those involved in the process of training the professional military are aware that our students should be culturally and linguistically competent as well. As teachers, we prepare the young learners while they are engaged in the education system but after graduation they should be aware that they are to engage in lifelong learning to maintain and enhance

professional competence and performance thus being able to ensure a high-quality service.

"The National Center for Cultural Competence" distinguishes between linguistic and cultural competence. In their opinion the linguistic competence is defined as: "The capacity of an organization and its personnel to communicate effectively, and convey information in a manner that is easily understood by diverse audiences including persons of limited proficiency in the majority [and] those who have low literacy skills or are not literate." [1]

Other experts, such as Diller and Moule, see cultural competence being centered on the skills and knowledge to effectively serve students from diverse cultures especially when applied to education. In their book, *"Cultural Competence: A Primer for Educators"*, they consider cultural competence as "the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than our own: as it entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, developing certain bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching." [2]

The question that rises is: Why is it important to be culturally competent? The answer is not a simple one. Nowadays we witness globalization of communications, trade and labor policies. We should admit that diversity is real. Considering this increasing diversity and interconnected issues, being aware of them seems to be the best strategy for accomplishing our objectives. As changes, be them academic, social, economic or military, occur faster and faster, organizations and individuals started understanding the need for cultural competence, realizing the need to improve our skills.

We will mention only the advantages of this rapid change to avoid a possible controversial discussion. Thus, we can name some of the benefits of building an

“organization's cultural competence” as presented in an on-line resource material [3]:

- increases respect and mutual understanding among those involved.
- increases creativity in problem-solving through new perspectives, ideas, and strategies.
- decreases unwanted surprises that might slow progress.
- increases participation and involvement of other cultural groups.
- increases trust and cooperation.
- helps overcome fear of mistakes, competition, or conflict
- promotes inclusion and equality.

As military professionals, our learners will do their jobs in stressful situations, during crises and they should be able to react quite fast to get a desired effect. To do so they must have not only vision and strategy but also know the cultural needs of their international partners or locals of the area they are deployed in, to understand them and be able to communicate with them.

In the study mentioned above the authors found some indicators of cultural competence stressing the importance of recognizing the power and influence of culture, of building on the strengths and resources of each culture in an organization, of eliminating prejudice in policies and practices or evaluating the organization's cultural competence on a regular basis. It is also important to acknowledge the ways past experiences affect present interactions, “to share power among leaders of different cultural backgrounds, to allocate enough resources for leadership and staff development in the area of cultural awareness, and understanding and very important, never assume that all members of cultural groups share the same beliefs and practices as different backgrounds can affect the possible responses to others.” [4]

In the book *“Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice”*, Geneva Gay considers responsive teaching and a formal and informal multicultural curriculum quite necessary “to have a

culturally informed classroom by using cultural appropriateness in teaching and learning strategies”. She recognizes “four basic cultural competence skill” areas that apply to educators and to the educational system as a whole. [5]

Thus, a learner should “value diversity” by accepting and respecting different cultural backgrounds and customs, different ways of communication, and different traditions and values; should be culturally aware by understanding, first, their own cultures – all of their experiences, background, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests shape their sense of who they are, where they fit into the community and society, and how they interact with others; “should understand the dynamics of cultural interactions by realizing that there are many factors that can affect interactions across cultures, including historical cultural experiences and relationships between cultures in a local community.” The educator has to stress the fact that culture plays a critical role in learning thus adopting appropriate teaching methods. [6] Banks, McGee and Cherry consider that the educators must become “knowledgeable about their students ‘cultural needs thus giving them information and knowledge by effective instruction and enriched curriculum.” [7]

Trying to offer solutions for developing cultural competence Paul Pedersen issued “a multicultural competence model” emphasizing three components: awareness, knowledge and skills. “Diversity Training University International” (DTUI) added a fourth cognitive component: attitude.

- **Awareness** is defined as “consciousness of one's personal reactions to people who are different”.
- **Attitude** is needed in order to emphasize the difference between training that increases awareness of cultural bias and beliefs in general and training of participants that have their own beliefs and values about cultural differences. Regardless our attitude towards cultural

differences we can improve our cross-cultural effectiveness by studying.

- **Knowledge**, a component and important part of cultural competence development, indicates that our values and beliefs about equality may be inconsistent with our behaviors, and we may be unaware of it.
- **Skills** component focuses on practicing cultural competence to perfection. In this case communication is the fundamental tool by which people interact in organizations. This includes gestures and other non-verbal communication that tend to vary from culture to culture. [8]

3. How to teach cultural and linguistic competence?

Culture is “the way of life, mainly the general customs and beliefs of a particular group of people at a particular time while linguistic competence is a speaker’s implicit, internalized knowledge of the rules of their language” (contrasted with linguistic performance) according to Cambridge dictionary.

According to Canale and Swain (1980), there are four underlying components of language that define linguistic competence: strategic competence – the aspect which all experts agree on as being the most important and in which students

"manipulate" the language in order to achieve their aims.

- “grammatical competence – refers to comprehension of morphology and syntax, the use of vocabulary and its mechanics, including aspects such as pronunciation and intonation;
- competence in speech – means the ability to apply the formal aspects of a language coherently in order to keep the communication comprehensible;
- sociolinguistic competence – is also an important part of language learning, because formal knowledge of a language does not prepare the student for using it effectively and fluently – it is also necessary to know what the likely outcome will be in social and cultural terms.” [9]

Bachman and Palmer (1996) consider that the “Crucial ability is language ability, but strategic knowledge also plays a role”. [10] The two main elements that language ability is made up of, namely organizational knowledge (mostly formal language structures) and the pragmatic knowledge (mostly production and understanding of communication) complement each other and also have subcomponents as is shown below in the figure.

Figure 1: Areas of language knowledge (Source: Bachman and Palmer 1996-68)

According to the Common European Framework the communicative language competences do not include the strategic competence. The communicative competence has the following components: linguistic competence (knowledge of and ability to form required structures using appropriate vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and orthography), sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of and correct use of language skills in social context) and pragmatic competence (discourse and function).

When teaching a foreign language all four skills play an important part in acquiring both cultural and linguistic competencies. We can do it starting with day-to-day conversations such as greetings, farewells, forms of address, thanking, making requests, and giving or receiving compliments thus offering the learners the possibility to know what is appropriate to say to whom, and in what situations, and it means understanding the beliefs and values represented by the various forms and usages of the language. Culture should be incorporated into language learning as distinct part of the curriculum.

In teaching culture, we can focus on topics as customs, manners of interacting, traditions, behaviors trying to enrich the learners linguistically as well, enabling students to function effectively in another language and society. According to Goode et. al., (2000) "language is not only part of how we define culture, it also reflects culture. Culture is a much broader concept that is inherently tied to many of the linguistic concepts taught in second language classes." [11] Non – verbal communication is also important so it should be studied as it includes issues

relating to: gestures, signs, mime, eye contact, physical contact, and personal space. Listening as well as observing are essential. Learners like being involved so we can ask them to prepare the information in advance. They can use on-line resources that teachers can indicate. We can ask them to prepare an oral presentation on a given topic or write an essay. We check both the information as well as the language used.

4. Conclusions

Although English classes are not allotted a sufficient number of hours due to our specific profiles, we should realize that language and culture shape learners' values and attitudes towards other groups, helping them to understand and accept other behaviours. Sharing a common language, they can communicate having the opportunity to learn from each other. It is important for the educators to build skills that make the learners enhance communication. We have to (1) provide our students with some cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviours of other people giving them '*cultural knowledge*', (2) *make them understand the differences that exist between cultures developing 'cultural sensitivity' and (3) prepare them to be part of a culturally competent organization and work effectively in cross-cultural situations thus enabling them with 'cultural competence'. By enhancing their linguistic and cultural competencies, by developing their knowledge and skills, by helping them be open to different cultural attitudes and values our students can become well trained professionals that can also manage situations, linguistically as well as culturally.*

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