

## **Extralinguistic competences and skills of the foreign language class**

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**Abstract:** *The technological osmosis from all domains of activity makes it necessary for the modern man to acquire new abilities, and especially rapidity and certainty of both intellectual and physical reflexes. Starting from gathering information as an essential principle, from knowing to a more intimate stage, culture must turn into a behavioral reflex, into a spontaneous thinking act, into natural mentality. Foreign language has become a fundamental subject in training non-philology students for everyday life. Contextualizing the information and introducing technological culture elements as well as humanist values of general education, the study of a foreign language through specialized language turns into a means of orientation, adaptation, transformation, education towards a reality and a world continually changing. The efforts of the foreign language teacher should be directed towards reaching that meeting point between technology and humanities.*

**Key-words:** *culture, technology, civilization, competence, performance, specialization, motivation*

### **1. Introduction**

If we think about culture literally (as all-around formation/development of the individual, starting from the intellectual action up to everyday gestures, from gathering information to behaviour and representing a fundamental acquisition of the human species in its general evolutionary efforts but also an inexhaustible resource, a permanent availability of every individual), we shall try to approach the relation existing between technological culture and humanities. The global technological boom can be nowadays translated into new life rhythms that only a few decades ago were not imaginable. Practical efficiency has replaced the not so long ago very championed idea of diversity. Specialization has turned into the new “disease” the world suffers from, but at the same time represents a necessary evil in this thicket of very stratified domains. We are all familiar to the definition of the specialist who tends to know everything about nothing, compared to the generalist who comes to know almost nothing about everything. So, teaching finds itself in front of some serious hindrance

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and experiences such deficiencies exactly due to the rapidity that economical, social and technological mutations take place. An abyss of mutual misunderstanding seems to appear between experts in technology and experts in humanities. There are two fundamental dimensions in culture and the ideal of one that teaches is to bring them together: the objective dimension of culture as a means of domination and transformation of things, and the subjective dimension of culture which refers to the inner universe, to the ancestral need for knowledge and spiritual development of the individual. The attraction of our civilization towards the first dimension of culture is obvious, since the latter allows an unlimited development of material means.

Culture can no longer mean exclusively knowledge, encyclopedic information or even speculation. What comes into focus in this technocratic society is the ability to adjust to anything new, by specialization, professional re-orientation and multi-qualification. The technological osmosis from all domains of activity makes it necessary for the modern man to acquire new abilities, and especially rapidity and certainty of both intellectual and physical reflexes. Culture, beyond the bookish concept and pragmatism, can be regarded as an instrument of peerless subtlety, extremely difficult to “handle”, but resulting in spectacular performances.

Starting from gathering information as an essential principle, from knowing to a more intimate stage, culture must turn into a behavioral reflex, into a spontaneous thinking act, into natural mentality. When Humboldt writes that: “Language is the formative organ of thought”, the conception saying that language is an accurate reproduction of reality comes definitively to an end. Humboldt also mentions: “The subjective activity of thinking is the one creating the object, for there is no thought that can be considered as the pure receptive contemplation of a previously designated object. The activity of assigning some meanings has to form a synthesis with the inner activity of spirit... For such a thing language is essential” (Humboldt 1989, 55). And further on: “The reciprocal interdependence of thinking and verb obviously shows that languages are not means of representation of an already known truth, but means to discover a truth ignored by them” (Humboldt 1989, 102). Such thesis implies without question some consequences, with multiple implications. If the perception of the world, or of the truth about it, cannot be conceived without the aid of language, it might be immediately deduced that language is one of the elements determining the conception about the world of the members of the linguistic communities speaking it. The next step is that each different language thus brings about different conceptions about the world, within the various linguistic communities of its members. Humboldt saw very clearly the consequences of his thesis: “the mental features and the development of one nation’s language are so closely linked that, knowing one of them, the other can be deduced, for the intellect and language allow and take only forms reciprocally compatible. Language can be considered an outer expression of the nations’ spirit. Language is their spirit and their spirit is language. The characteristic way each language organizes itself in order to express its own “conception about the world”, is what Humboldt terms “the inner form of a language”.

## **2. Technological culture and humanities**

We cannot possibly think today of a good specialist if unable to speak at least one foreign language of wide circulation at a level which allows them to handle specialised language. In order to achieve this major goal, revised teaching techniques have become a priority, especially as there are no hard and fast rules in the field of foreign language teaching.

So, included in the university curriculum and following the indications of the Bologna convention, the foreign language course addressed to students - future specialists in other domains but humanities - can try to accomplish a correlation between practical and informative, efficient and conceptual, material and spiritual.

The study of a foreign language emphasizes its aspect as a precisely structured system and, as any scientific subject, is necessarily approached in light of a set of rules and principles. These rules and principles mirror a linguistic mentality that reflects a specific manner, which was in turn shaped by an intricate and long-lasting canvas of historical, economical and social realities. So, the study of language demands its rightful implication in fathoming the culture and civilization data, too. On the other hand, from a purely practical perspective, it is hard to realize a group of exercises regarding the competences of receiving and transmitting messages outside a stimulating context, in which those stimulated are the situation and authenticity. Contextualizing the information and introducing technological culture elements as well as humanist values of general education, the study of a foreign language through specialized language turns into a means of orientation, adaptation, transformation, education towards a reality and a world continually changing.

The efforts of the foreign language teacher should be directed towards reaching that meeting point between technology and humanities. Making contact with a different people's way of thinking and expressing themselves has an important part in aiming at a harmonious education, at enriching one's information and spiritual knowledge of a student at the age of formation, of a complete self development. In this foreign language class the student that does not attend the Letters faculty comes into contact with a different manner of taking possession of the world, with a different method of understanding that the universe expects its explorers, with another type of self-accomplishment and self-development.

In order to assimilate entirely the linguistic knowledge and to achieve opinions that are sustained by a richer argumentative basis, the teacher will direct all discussion towards friendly rivalry, tactfully taking into consideration all personal stands and information-based demonstrations, rejecting passivity, shallowness or refusal to research subtly, and being also able to create a current of cultural opinion, be it general or individual. The teacher will try to create the ability to analyze and interpret the realities of the modern world by insisting upon the necessity of staying up-to-date on general everyday life events.

The particular teaching act rises to the level of the general desideration translated into civic and ethical education (respect towards the traditional, moral, generally human values, but also towards the future career). Competence and performance are the imperatives that must have as objectives teaching a foreign language, understanding a written and spoken message, uttering an oral or written communication. By assimilating knowledge, by getting used to associate different facts, to order and systemize them, but also to interpret them, the young man becomes gradually more sensitive towards the reality he comes into contact with, becomes more open-minded and acquires the ability to have an attitude, to generate personal opinions, to define himself in relation with it. In a united Europe, speaking a foreign language means having the possibility to define yourself better. Culture is an option tool that dictates the decisions of civilized people.

On the other hand, returning to specialized language, which is one of the main objectives of this class, beyond making inventories, lists that come to be most useful reference material in helping one position itself in studying specialized vocabulary, we encounter the problem of expanding the circle of linguistic analysis beyond the phrase level to the text level in a pragmatic manner, as a clarification of the communication acts specific to this type of assertion: the manner of defining concepts and notions, of emitting hypotheses and drawing conclusions, of bringing arguments, discussing or fighting some opinions, of evaluating and comparing, of describing the structure and a machine way of functioning, of a device, etc., of writing the use and maintenance manual for them.

As far as the characteristics of the technical and scientific language are concerned, one must underline the difference from the other registries of a language, whichever that is. Thus we suppose that a scientific and technical text is organized (and presented) as a straight line, according to a selection of syntactical, lexical and rhetorical means that pertain to general language, in short, according to a code characterized by: a) The almost complete erasing of the differences between written and oral speech; b) The impersonal aspect of communication; c) That leads to reducing personal forms and the obvious preference of impersonal forms; d) The reduction of time references as a result of the general and universal character of the technical and scientific significance; e) The objectivity of the communication, which implies disappearance of connotation and subjective statements; f) The tendency of reaching a very accurate and also brief enunciation. From a lexical point of view, one will have to distinguish between general scientific vocabulary and specialized vocabulary, although they have scientific syntax in common.

One feels as necessary to draw up a methodology on approaching and exploiting the material selected for study in order to acquire assessable abilities that can be transferred into the immediate reality with a maximum of efficiency.

The cross-disciplinary method supported by the use of multi-media techniques is a general solution and it responds to the exigencies of rendering the educational process efficient and of adopting a new strategy in the teaching/ learning activity.

The acquisition of the ability of improving and enriching the specialty linguistic competence turned the implementation of the cross-disciplinary method a major exigency for the foreign language course. That is why the teacher and his/her vision are very important.

With the written text in front of them or listening/watching the tape again, they go over and thoroughly study each fragment again, by pointing out new vocabulary with synonyms, antonyms, expressions that contain it, contexts in which we use it. Newly introduced terms and grammatical structures are written on the blackboard. Students will write their meaning and equivalents in Romanian in their notebooks: a) The information (message) will be repeated by questions the teacher will ask or by students making a summary including the main idea, a means of verifying whether they have acquired the new terms, their competence to understand and communicate ideas in the foreign language; b) Exploiting the lexicogrammatical models by structural exercises (oral or written, depending on the necessity); c) Introducing recently acquired vocabulary in new contexts; d) Discussing the theme, making connections; e) Writing a text on a given theme; f) Translation that will emphasize on the continuity of ideas of the studied text; g) Simulating situations that relate to the text. (Girard 1995, 126)

Paraphrasing the old saying that “general knowledge is what you have left after you have forgotten everything else”, the essential acquisition of students attending the foreign language class will be what everyone of them is left with, after a great amount of information has transformed into behaviour or, differently said, has turned into a real business card. The speech acts of various communicative contexts in everyday life are regarded as an essential aspect of communicative skills. The teacher’s role evolves alongside the student’s, who gains an active role in his/her education. The 21<sup>st</sup> century opens up a new approach to the communicative methodology, which rounds up and particularizes its practices and strategies (see the action-language approach, promoted by the European linguistic documents, especially by the CEFR). The action-language model is based on the actions that the learner intends to perform in the studied language. Its principle consists in the accomplishment of tasks by an actor through different strategies in four domains: personal, public, educational and professional.

General objectives, with the aim to promote self-confidence in students and to develop their personality, are difficult to assess (in pedagogical terms, they are called ‘final objectives’). They must be conceived so as to describe an observable wanted effect. The students’ degree of competence and performance in a foreign language is an easy-to-follow phenomenon, not only through their capacity to express themselves, but also through a multitude of options that open up in gathering knowledge, when mastering a foreign language of wide circulation (e.g. the search of international database resources, participation in multicultural projects and events, exchange student programmes, etc.)

### 3. Conclusion

The new target of the modern education is that of holding the student for an explorer. Beyond the specialists' common language which cross-disciplinary method can offer to the foreign language course, it will allow of conceptual and methodical changes, having as first objective the development of new communication abilities due to the multitude of possible combinations created by the cross-disciplinary method (adjacent fields to the problems, methods, concepts). The communication competences involve: reception, production, interaction and mediation (it involves a third person). In the context of the need for intercultural communication, an approach to language courses from the teacher's philological perspective has a cultural, humanist dimension, different from the language of the students' specific fields of study. Language competences are developed in various communicational contexts, implying a correct and applied comprehension of the written or spoken message. Besides communication skills in specialized language and in addition to cultural approaches, the language courses for students specializing in other fields than humanities implicitly include communication skills for various, everyday situations. For example, language courses for Economics students, in addition to business correspondence, comprising types of letters with specific purposes (offer, order, complaint, sale, shipping, insurance), also focus on formal personal correspondence (CV, letters of request, letters of application for a vacancy, preparing for a job interview etc.). This will lead to debates regarding the tone of writing, politeness, attitudes, careful selection of words, interpersonal relationship, discourse, narratives etc. Methodological options in developing the teaching syllabus should contain elements which stimulate creativity and sociability, enabling the development of oral and written communication skills and of a positive, harmonious, civilized attitude. When assessing a successful language course, a fundamental aspect for the students is the cultural dimension, which plays a vital role in awaking their curiosity for new horizons, in arousing their interest in the world around us.

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