Strategies Employed for Information Transfer and Relation Building in Intercultural Communication – A Cross-Cultural Study

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Abstract. The aim of the study is to examine strategies used in intercultural encounters by Polish and Turkish students of Foreign Languages (n1=50, n2=50, respectively) who have experienced intercultural communication. Intercultural encounters are viewed as 'language-in-action' situations because they provide a rich source of information about linguistic devices used during intercultural exchanges, sources of misunderstanding and miscommunication, and strategies implemented to transfer information or maintain conversational involvement of the interlocutors. This study offers some insights into the frequency and variety of the strategies used in intercultural encounters. It was conducted as a small-scale project, with the Critical Incident Technique and questionnaires administered to collect data. The research participants (C1/C2 levels of proficiency) were supposed to produce written narratives describing the most memorable intercultural encounters and report on intercultural communication strategies. Their narratives were later analysed to identify strategies applied to manage intercultural communication and achieve communicative goals (e.g. maintaining contact and/or conveying necessary information). Research findings show that Proactively seeking clarification and Building intercultural connection or relationship were the most frequent strategies used by these two groups. However, research results also suggest that the choice of strategies depends on such factors as the participants' level of language proficiency, their cultural background or the quality and quantity of intercultural contacts. Cross-cultural analysis indicates that Turkish students are more socially- and culturally oriented, whereas Polish students display a tendency to focus more on cognitive and linguistic aspects of intercultural encounters. Findings from the study can be of help for educators and trainers involved in researching intercultural communication, strategic involvement and training.

Keywords: intercultural communication, information transfer, seeking clarification, strategies in intercultural encounters.

Кілянська-Пжибило Гражина. Стратегії передавання інформації та побудови відносин у міжкультурній комунікації: крос-культурне дослідження.

Анотація. Метою дослідження є вивчення стратегій, що використовують у міжкультурних ситуаціях польські та турецькі студенти-філологи (n1=50, n2=50, відповідно), які мали досвід міжкультурної комунікації. Міжкультурні контакти розглядають як ситуацію «мови в дії», оскільки воно є багатим джерелом інформації про мовні засоби, якими

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послуговуються під час міжкультурних обмінів, про джерела непорозумінь і невдач у спілкуванні, а також про стратегії, які застосовуються для передавання інформації або підтримання залученості комунікантів до розмови. Це дослідження дає певне уявлення про частоту та різноманітність стратегій, використовуваних під час міжкультурних контактів. Воно було проведене як невеликий проєкт із застосуванням техніки критичних інцидентів та анкетування для збирання даних. Учасники дослідження (рівень володіння мовою C1/C2) повинні були підготувати письмові розповіді про найбільш пам'ятні міжкультурні зустрічі та повідомити про стратегії міжкультурної комунікації, які вони використовували. Їхні розповіді було проаналізовано для визначення стратегій, що застосовували для керування міжкультурною комунікацією та досягнення комунікативних цілей (напр., підтримання контакту та/або передавання потрібної інформації). Результати дослідження засвідчили, що найпоширенішими стратегіями, які використовували ці дві групи, були «Проактивний пошук роз'яснень» та «Побудова міжкультурного зв'язку чи стосунків». Однак результати дослідження також свідчать про те, що вибір стратегій залежить від таких чинників, як рівень володіння мовою учасниками, їхнє культурне походження, а також якість і кількість міжкультурних контактів. Крос-культурний аналіз вказує на те, що турецькі студенти більш соціально і культурно орієнтовані, а польські студенти демонструють тенденцію збільшого зосереджуватися на когнітивних і лінгвістичних аспектах міжкультурних контактів. Результати дослідження можуть бути корисними для викладачів і тренерів, які займаються проблемами вивчення міжкультурної комунікації, стратегічного залучення і навчання.

Ключові слова: міжкультурна комунікація, передавання інформації, пошук роз'яснень, стратегії в міжкультурних контактах.

Introduction

An increasing number of exchange programmes and mobility opportunities call for inquiry into strategies participants of intercultural encounters employ to successfully transfer information and manage cross-cultural communication. The unique character of an intercultural encounter, with its unpredictable nature, risk, shocks and ruptures as well as creativity has attracted the researchers' attention for some time now (cf. Christiansen et al., 2017; Henderson et al., 2016; Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2017; Wilson, 2017). Intercultural contacts or, in other words, interactional exchanges and the process of interpretations are dependent on sociocultural knowledge (Kramsh & Uryu, 2014, p. 214). Research on communicative practices in intercultural encounters shows that expressing politeness is determined by cultural rules (Matsumoto, 1988; Selye, 1994). Also, conversational strategies for conveying distance, deference, or camaraderie vary from culture to culture (Lakoff, 1990; Kramsch & Uryu, 2014, p. 214; Seelye, 1994). Jain and Krieger (2011) list the three most common sources of difficulty for managing intercultural communication, which include language, emotion, and cultural norms. Not realizing the factors and their impact upon communicative practices may lead to miscommunication or a sense of discomfort (Kramsch & Uryu, 2014). Some other researchers (e.g. Croucher et al., 2015; Duronto et al,, 2005; Gudykunst, 1998, Hammer et al., 1998, Presbitero & Attar, 2018) stress the fact that anxiety and uncertainty have a significant impact on cross-cultural communication. Thus, developing anxiety and uncertainty-reduction strategies is a key to effectively manage intercultural communication.

Intercultural encounters are viewed as 'language-in-action' situations that can be examined to identify linguistic and conversational devices used in intercultural dialogues, sources of misunderstanding and miscommunication (e.g. linguistic and pragmatic failure) and, finally, strategies implemented to maintain conversational involvement of the interlocutors and information transfer. This paper examines some typologies of adaptive and intervention strategies applied in intercultural encounters (e.g. Drake, 1995; Hooi & Yong, 2015; Kenesei & Stier, 2017). The paper also presents the empirical study that focuses on the strategic involvement of Polish and Turkish students of English who have experienced intercultural communication.

The Concept of Intercultural Competence

There is no single model of intercultural competence that fits every intercultural experience (Guilherme 2014, p. 357). Consequently, the idea of intercultural competence continues to develop in various directions; however some common things emerge from research. Some definitions stress the interactional aspect of intercultural competence. For example, Guilherme (2000, p. 297; 2014, p. 158) defines the intercultural competence as 'the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures that we recognize as different from our own'. Similarly, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009, p. 7) describe the intercultural competence as 'the appropriate and effective and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations to the world.'

Risager (2009) offers a slightly broadened definition of the concept. For her, 'intercultural competence is very much the competence of navigating in the world, both at the micro-level of social interaction in culturally complex settings, and at macro-levels through networks like diasporas and media communications' (Risager 2009, p. 16; Guilherme 2014, p. 358). Byram (1997) focuses on knowledge and skills that an intercultural speaker needs to develop in the process of intercultural competence building. Byram's model of intercultural competence consists of five main elements, or in other words 'savoirs', attitudes (curiosity, openness - savoir être), knowledge (savoir), skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre), skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire) and Critical cultural awareness (savoir engager) (Byram, 1997). Byram builds on the notions of communicative competence. First of all, he describes linguistic elements that are characteristic of an intercultural speaker (Wilkinson, 2014, pp. 309-311). Later, he discusses some components (savoirs) that are linked to the cultural dimension of the intercultural speaker's competence. Finally, he presents skills that are essential in successful communication across languages and cultures. According to Wilkinson (2014, p. 309), Byram's model has had a substantial impact on the process of second/foreign language training, especially in the European context.

As noted in literature. intercultural experience is not synonymous with intercultural competence (Guilherme 2014, p. 357). However, Byram (1997, p. 27)

goes a step forward suggesting that active 'cultural experience' can be analyzed thoroughly, and used to facilitate cultural awareness and intercultural competence (Wilkinson, 2014, p. 302).

Strategies to Manage Intercultural Communication – Theoretical Background

Literature review (Croucher et al., 2015; Duronto et al., 2005; Gudykunst, 1998; Hammer et al., 1998; Presbitero & Attar, 2018) on intercultural communication management shows that Anxiety–Uncertainty Management theory by Gudykunst (1998) has strongly influenced research on interpersonal and intergroup communication effectiveness. Some authors (e.g. Hammer et al, 1998; Presbitero & Attar, 2018) claim that individual-level attributes (i.e., anxiety and uncertainty) can relate to knowledge sharing.

Duronto et al (2005) point out that uncertainty is a cognitive phenomenon, and they identify two types of uncertainty: predictive (the uncertainty about predicting others' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, values, and behaviours) and explanatory (the individual ability to explain the behaviour, attitudes, feelings, thoughts and beliefs of strangers). They assume that high levels of uncertainty lead to increased anxiety (ibid.).

Anxiety, another crucial factor determining successful cross-cultural communication, is defined as the affective (emotional) equivalent of uncertainty (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001). Similarly, Toomey et al. (2013) state that individuals need to manage anxiety related with 'emotional insecurity or vulnerability because of a perceived threat or fear in a culturally estranged environment.'

The findings of the research conducted in the Japanese context by Duronto et al. (2005) indicate that meeting with a stranger generates anxiety or avoidance, depending on whether the stranger belongs to the same or a different culture. The authors believe that uncertainty is higher when meeting strangers from a different culture.

The issue of effective strategies for managing intercultural communication has captured researchers' attention for some time now. Some studies examined strategies used in intercultural communication in general contexts. Henderson et al. (2015) write about three most frequent strategies, namely relation building (this can be achieved by deliberate social contact with others, normalising their cultural behaviour, and being friendly); proactively seeking clarification during interaction (this includes, for example, feedback mechanisms, asking and giving explanations); and acquiring cultural knowledge. Similarly, Hooi and Yong (2015) present strategies for intercultural communication that aim at establishing contact and seeking clarification. The former can be achieved by showing friendly behaviour, exercising patience, whereas the latter is achieved by frequently checking for understanding, and dealing with language difficulties. Yet, Hooi and Yong (2015) do not mention strategies related to sociocultural knowledge development or extension. Research carried out by Philip et al. (2015, p. 2635) depicts the importance of sociocultural

strategies as well as strategies which aim at regulating emotions. The authors highlight the following strategies: recognising and alleviating barriers to promote effective communication and undesirable emotions such as fear, uncertainty or lack of confidence.

Sociocultural strategies are also mentioned by Toomey et al. (2013) and Savignon and Sysoev (2002). Interestingly, the latter provide a whole list of sociocultural strategies for establishing and maintaining intercultural contact, which include the following: initiating and maintaining intercultural contact for the purpose of learning about the values, norms, spiritual heritage, and so forth of a L2 culture; acting as a representative of your own culture; anticipating sociocultural lacunae that can result in misunderstanding, creation of false stereotypes and intercultural conflict; taking initiative and responsibility for avoiding intercultural misunderstanding, explaining features of one's own culture; asking interlocutors to explain features of their culture; using diplomacy for the purpose of maintaining a dialogue of cultures in the spirit of peace and mutual understanding; redirecting a discussion to a more neutral topic; dissimulation of personal views to avoid potential conflict (Savignon & Sysoev, 2002). Apart from sociocultural strategy, Toomey et al. (2013) also write about language-oriented strategies of code-switching and bridging (the intentional use of connection and integrative strategies to reach out to diverse group). Language-oriented strategies are also pointed out by Berardo (2011) who lists ten intercultural communication strategies to overcome language barriers. The list includes the following: speaking slowly and clearly, asking for clarification, frequently checking for understanding, avoiding idioms and jargon, realizing the basics of communication, being specific, choosing effective medium of communication, providing information via multiple channels, and being patient.

Some other studies presented in this section concentrate on specific contexts of business or service intercultural encounters (e.g. Fujio, 2004; Kenesei & Stier, 2017). The strategies identified in business intercultural communication (Fujio, 2004) focus mostly on face-maintaining moves and conversational devices used to deal with communication traps or breakdowns. The strategies mentioned in this study include, among others, silence, ambiguous answers and politeness strategies.

In connection with service intercultural encounters (Kenesei & Stier, 2017), the authors of the research suggest three broad categories of strategies that need to address the following challenges faced during service intercultural communication: overcoming linguistic barriers, overcoming cultural barriers and manifesting relation-building attitudes of openness, friendliness and helpfulness. Congruent with this research is the study on hospitality industry (strategies used by Thai hotel interns; Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020). Its findings indicate five intercultural communication strategies of critical cultural awareness, attitudes, knowledge, skills to interpret and relate, and skills to discover and interact that Thai hotel interns should apply. Similarly, the research by Huang (2011) lists some key strategies that operate in intercultural communication in tourism education: adapting to cultural differences, adopting appropriate skills, creating similarities, maintaining appropriate

relationships, and promoting conflict resolution strategies. Interestingly, these strategies can be also used in the language education context. Table 1 presents an overview of research focusing on the types of strategies implemented during intercultural encounters.

Table 1
Strategies Used in Intercultural Communication – Literature Overview

The study	Strategies used in intercultural communication
Henderson et al. (2016)	- resorting to cultural validation through alliance building (deliberate social contact with others, normalising their cultural behaviour, and being friendly); - proactively seeking clarification during interaction Using feedback mechanisms; asking and giving explanations); - acquiring cultural awareness knowledge.
Philip et al (2015)	- socialization and acculturation (seeking clarification in unfamiliar situations, observation and immersion in cultural interactions); - recognising and alleviating barriers to promote effective communication such as undesirable emotions such as fear, uncertainty and lack of confidence in an intercultural communication context act as a significant barrier in building relations.
Toomey et al. (2013)	- code-switching; - bridging - the intentional use of connection and integrative strategies to reach out to diverse group; - cultural frame shifting.
Savignon & Sysoev (2002)	Sociocultural Strategies Strategies for Establishing and Maintaining Intercultural Contact; - initiating and maintaining intercultural contact for the purpose of learning about the values, norms, spiritual heritage, and so forth of a L2 culture; acting as a representative of your own culture; - anticipating sociocultural lacunae that can result in misunderstanding, creation of false stereotypes and intercultural conflict; - taking initiative and responsibility for avoiding intercultural misunderstanding, explaining features of one's own culture; asking interlocutors to explain features of their culture; - using diplomacy for the purpose of maintaining a dialogue of cultures in the spirit of peace and mutual

	understanding; redirecting a discussion to a more neutral topic; dissimulation of personal views to avoid potential conflict.
Fujo (2004) Strategies in business intercultural communication	- silence; - ambiguous answers; - politeness strategies.
Berardo (2008)	10 intercultural communication strategies to overcome language barriers: 1) speak slowly and clearly, 2) ask for clarification, 3)frequently check for understanding, 4) avoid idioms, 5) be careful of jargons, 6) define the basics of communication, 7) be specific, 8) choose your medium of communication effectively, 9) provide information via multiple channels, and 10) be patient.
Hooi and Yong (2015)	- showing friendly behaviour, - exercising patience, - frequently checking for understanding, - dealing with language difficulties
Kenesei and Stier (2016)	Strategies used in service encounters - overcoming linguistic barriers - overcoming cultural barriers - openness, friendliness, helpfulness

To sum up, strategies activated to initiate and maintain intercultural contact fall into three broad categories: (1) strategies used to overcome linguistic barriers, (2) strategies to deal with cultural differences, and (3) strategies used to regulate emotions. They may be dependent on some factors such as contextual constraints, individual's language proficiency, personal predispositions and intercultural experiences to mention just a few.

Method

The aim of the study is to investigate strategies used in intercultural encounters by Polish and Turkish students of Foreign Language Departments. This study utilizes the Critical Incident Technique (the CIT) to collect data as the research participants are supposed to produce a narrative and report on strategies used in intercultural communication. The CIT technique has found its place in cross- cultural research because of its potential to reveal mechanisms operating in cross-cultural communication and shed some light on the thinking processes of those who have experienced cross-cultural contacts (Arthur, 2001; Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2017; McAllister et al., 2006; Méndez Garcia, 2017; Pedersen, 1995; Thiel, 1999). For Wilkinson (2014, p. 304), asking students to observe and report on intercultural

experiences can lead to a greater engagement with a particular aspect of culture. Moreover, it develops understanding, sensitivity to daily life situations and mediation skills.

Research participants were requested to write a narrative describing the most memorable encounter foreigners they have experienced. Their narratives included the descriptive and reflective components of the encounter. The narratives focused on themes and emotions experienced by research participants during intercultural encounters that they reported. Later on, the data was examined to depict the most frequent strategies implemented to manage intercultural communication. The taxonomy of strategies proposed by Henderson et al. (2016) was used in the process of data analysis and strategy identification. Furthermore, questionnaires were administered to obtain some students' biodata. Data collection was preceded by a series of lectures aiming to familiarize the students about cross- cultural communication.

As far as research participants' profiles are concerned, 50 students of English Philology Department (one of the universities, Poland), aged 23- 24 and 50 students of Faculty of Languages (one of the universities, Turkey), aged 22- 23, were involved in the study. Talking about the subjects' background, both groups of students pursued their MA- programmes, specializing in teacher training. Throughout their BA and MA studies they covered some courses in ELT, SLA theory, psychology, linguistics and applied linguistics. Research participants in both groups claimed to have had some, irregular contacts with foreigners, including both direct and indirect (technology mediated) contacts in their home countries or abroad.

Results

Linguistic Analysis of the Narratives

As regards the linguistic-structural analysis, the narratives were examined in terms of their length, structure and linguistic devices used. Looking at the structure of the narratives, the following tendencies can be observed. The wording used in the narratives ranges from 340 (the minimum number of characters) to 788 (the maximum number), with 489, being the average number.

Interestingly, sometimes the research participants used 'buffering' strategies to open their narratives, especially in the case of narrating some critical incidents that described unsuccessful, problematic or difficult to handle situation. Toomey et al (2013) classify 'buffering' strategy as an identity protection strategy, a sort of a 'psychological shield' that is activated in face identity-threatening or hostile circumstances. Noteworthy is the fact that the buffering strategies were displayed by the representatives of both groups. Some examples of such strategies present in the narratives' openings are included below.

CI (T.34): I don't have much experience with contacts with native speakers of English. I have never been to an English speaking country. However, once I met a native speaker – I was positively surprised (...).

CI (P.55): In the beginning the fear of speaking overwhelmed me completely. I felt very awkward speaking in English and was unduly meticulous in the use of words. On the one hand, my colleagues were impressed with the vocabulary I used (...).

It seems that the process of disclosing and admitting to having difficulties in managing cross-cultural communication was quite a challenge for some of the research participants. Consequently, recognizing difficulties was immediately followed by descriptions of something positive or something that the respondents had control over, for example, preventing miscommunication, handling difficulties or achieving communicative success despite initial problems.

Content Analysis and Strategies Identified

As far as the content analysis is concerned, the narratives generated by these two groups of the research participants were examined to identify themes, emotions and strategies that the subjects reported. Having analyzed our data, we have managed to list the following strategies used by the research participants in intercultural exchanges (see Table 2).

Table 2
Strategies Reported to be Used in Intercultural Encounters

Polish respondents	Turkish respondents
(1) Proactively seeking clarification (e.g. by asking direct or indirect questions for clarification and help; indicating lack of understanding, using non-verbal signals; using conversational adjustments); (2) Building intercultural connection or relationship (e.g., making deliberate social contacts, sustaining conversation despite initial difficulties, modifying one's own behaviour, explaining one's own cultural or linguistic behaviour i.e. normalizing it, being friendly, using humor; (3) Dealing with language difficulties (e.g. code switching, using cognates, language creativity).	(1) Building intercultural connection or relationship (e.g. making deliberate social contacts, sustaining conversation despite initial difficulties, modifying one's own behaviour, explaining one's own cultural or linguistic behaviour i.e. normalizing it, being friendly, using humor; (2) Proactively seeking clarification (e.g. by asking direct or indirect questions for clarification and help; indicating lack of understanding, using non-verbal signals); (3) Dealing with language difficulties (e.g. code switching, using synonyms, paraphrase);

As far as the content analysis of the narratives is concerned, *proactively seeking clarification* (e.g. by asking direct or indirect questions for clarification and help; indicating lack of understanding, using non-verbal signals) was the strategy most frequently used by the Polish respondents. This strategy was also quite popular among the Turkish respondents. The samples of the students' narratives are included below (to preserve their character, the narratives were left unedited and unmodified).

CI (P2.91): During these three days I was very nervous. I have never spoken to a native speaker who does not know Polish. I knew that I would be very ashamed if I did not manage to understand or get any information for him. Eventually, I dialed the number. (...) Suddenly I heard someone on the other side. I introduced myself and explained my problem. Everything was great until he started to explain what I should do. I was so nervous that I had a problem with understanding what he was saying. I had to repeat his words several times to make sure I knew what I should say.

CI (T21): When we were drinking tea, I was thinking how to offer tea to her, because I knew each word separately, but couldn't combine them to make a sentence. I was looking at the cups, and then at my friend desperately. That day was a real shame for me. I realized that I didn't know anything related to real life.
CI (T1): to learn in this example is to stay positive, using optimistic mimics and keeping calm when we encounter intercultural competences. (...) Now I can understand that he was as confused as me when he heard about my cultural differences.

For the Turkish respondents, *building intercultural connection or relationship* was the most frequent strategy applied during intercultural communication. The subjects admitted to making deliberate social contacts, sustaining conversation despite initial difficulties, modifying one's own behaviour, explaining one's own cultural or linguistic behaviour i.e. normalizing it, being friendly, using humor. In general, they valued the opportunity to *socialize and make friends with foreigners and share their traditions or national culture with representatives of other cultures.* Some samples of the students' narratives are presented below.

CI (P2.59): The politeness of the Scottish people helped me break barriers both linguistic and social. I believe that people should be open to different societies, points of view, attitudes, benefit from them as they can help us broaden horizons and become more open-minded. When it comes to my teaching experience, I always try to inject in my students the positive attitudes, teach about aspects of tolerance and reasonable attitudes towards stereotypes.

CI (P2.11): At the beginning I got irritated sometimes, as she performed different manners of behavior I wasn't adapted to. She was speaking very loudly, she was directly expressing her opinions (some of them weren't very nice). But with the passage of the time we become really good friends and I acquainted with her demeanor.

CI (T9): People who have different cultures, religions and ethnics can socialize, make friends.

CI (T10): The other thing I realized about the effective communication was ''being companionable'' during the conversation.

Both groups of the respondents used strategies that aimed at *dealing with language difficulties and linguistic problems* encountered during intercultural communication. The students reported to have used code switching, non-verbal descriptions, simplification, paraphrase, etc. Some of them generated novel and genuine phrases when they lacked certain vocabulary items, e.g. 'a fire machine' instead of 'a lighter' (this example comes from the Polish subject). Interestingly, sometimes the respondents reported avoidance strategies, e.g. remaining silent or refraining from interaction.

CI (P2.83): Hence, being in England I had to recall and reflect upon some situations and remember using the polite phrases like Thank you, Please, Sorry, How are you? Sometimes even more than just once, in order not to be regarded as someone rude or a stranger. And even though, I perceive myself as a quite polite person, the overwhelming amount of their politeness sometimes made me a little bit confused.

CI (P2.90): As soon as I realized that I don't understand people living in Belfast, I felt inhibited. I was afraid to say a word. And to the end of my 'Holidays' I did not say a word, I was avoiding contact with people living around, native speakers of that language. To make things worse, my friend, with whom I was visiting my sister, was doing great – he had some minor difficulties with communication, but the speed of speech, accent or strange dialect were not a problem. I must add that we were at the same group in our studies, we were at the same level. When I came back to Poland and the term started, I was unable to force myself to use the language during classes. I refused to work, my grades deteriorated, I almost lost the battle. I t took me a year to be back on my feet. After finishing the college, I paid my sister another visit and despite many doubts, it was better than for the first time. I cannot say that I understood each word, but I overcame my fear and started to communicate with people, especially in every day situations. It was not so bad.

CI (T21): As a student, I saw my deficiencies clearly. Language should help to make life easy and communicate with others. As a core, I learned that the important one is not to know lots of words, prepositions, etc., it is to know how to use them in real life.

The Polish and Turkish students said that *gathering information prior to the communication* or *acquiring cultural knowledge* helps a lot while preparing for intercultural communication. The very experience of intercultural communication can lead to students' language and knowledge exploration and discovery.

Research participants also issued comments that cross-cultural encounters raised their language awareness and sensitivity concerning the contextualized use of the foreign language, especially in the area of non-verbal communication and various forms of politeness. Some of the respondents claimed to have extended their vocabulary and broadened their lexical knowledge.

Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Narratives

Cross-cultural analysis of the narratives highlighted some differences between these two groups of the respondents. The Turkish students were more socially-oriented and implemented more strategies focusing on building connection and maintaining a relationship. They also reported to have extended their cultural knowledge and have gained some personal benefits. The Polish students displayed a tendency to focus on cognitive and linguistic aspects of intercultural encounters. They commented upon their increased language awareness, sociolinguistic awareness and personal satisfaction achieved from successful intercultural exchanges. Both groups of the research participants mentioned a wide range of emotions they experienced during intercultural encounters.

Some additional benefits or non-linguistic issues were derived by the research participants from their intercultural encounters. The Polish respondents mentioned increased self-observation and self-regulatory skills concerning, for example, ways of handling difficult or stress-evoking situations. They also commented upon developing self-knowledge and self-confidence as well as linguistics confidence. Some of their narratives described satisfaction resulting from the participants' positive experiences in managing their intercultural contacts.

The Turkish respondents stressed the opportunity to share their national cultural heritage to others and develop cross-cultural awareness. They also mentioned increased communication awareness and sensitivity of contextual cues that may affect communication.

Conclusions

To sum up, the investigation of strategic involvement in intercultural communication seems essential as it is supposed to shed some light on the frequency and effectiveness of the strategies used in intercultural encounters and possibly motivate further research. Our work has led us to list the most frequently strategies used in intercultural encounters, namely proactively seeking clarification, building intercultural connection or relationship and dealing with language difficulties. We have managed to identify major differences between the two groups of respondents. The results of this study also indicate that the choice of strategies depends on a number of factors such as the level of language proficiency of the study participants, their cultural background as well as the quality and quantity of intercultural contacts.

Although quite positive about the research results, we do realize that a number of potential limitations need to be considered. To begin with, they include the selection of the research tool which tends to elicit explicit knowledge that respondents are ready or willing to disclose. Further inquiry into strategic involvement conducted with a different tool may give additional insights into the problem. In this study, some strategies (e.g. avoidance and silence) could not be traced in the narratives.

Literature review indicates that strategy use is dependent on different contexts (professional, academic, social, etc.), interlocutors and their background (e.g. native vs non- native speakers); type of relationship and the level of familiarity (professional contacts, meeting a stranger, etc.). Further research with the selection of different tools (e.g. retrospective techniques or think aloud protocols) could possibly focus on those areas.

It would also be essential to find the correlation between the strategy use and the type of intercultural encounters. This study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the frequency and effectiveness of the strategies used in intercultural encounters and it has established a ground for further research.

Moreover, it would be good to examine the correlation between various personal traits and individuals' potential to manage cross-cultural communication. As Presbitero & Attar (2018) state, CQ (cultural intelligence) can interact with other individual-level characteristics and dispositions, such as anxiety and uncertainty, to yield desirable outcomes, such as intercultural communication effectiveness and eventually knowledge sharing. Research extension could also focus on classroom training (with culture simulation) to enhance and develop students' CQ.

Finally, findings from the current study also have the potential to inform educators and trainers to design adequate strategy training and prepare future participants for their intercultural encounters. In particular, situations described in critical incidents can be used to: raise students' awareness about their emotions and reactions to novel situations; provoke students' reflection and ideas sharing; start discussion about cultures and culture specific elements and their impact on cross-cultural communication; increase students' (self-)knowledge in the areas of emotional resilience, flexibility, openness, etc. Taking all things into consideration, it would be advisable to continue research in this area of interest to work out patterns of possible reactions or examine various scenarios of intercultural encounters that take personal predispositions and contextual constraints into account.

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