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Intercultural Competence: Is It One of the Goals of English Language Teaching in Serbia?²

Extended summary

The paper examines attitudes of the Serbian academic community towards the cultural aspects of the English language teaching in order to evaluate if there exist a rationale and a need to set a goal of acquiring intercultural competence.

As the global spread of English questions the exclusive usage of the British and North American English varieties, there is a need to discuss the cultural aspects of the English language variation in the context of prioritizing Anglophone cultures in English language pedagogy from the perspective of multilingualism and multiculturalism. The results of the study are important for bringing decisions in the field of the local language policy in accordance with the recommendations of the European Union, which will reflect on pedagogical activities at the local level.

The quantitative research included 578 students and English teachers of both sexes and different ages, studying and working at Serbian universities in Belgrade, Niš and Novi Sad.

Measuring instruments applied in the quantitative research are two questionnaires, for teachers and students respectively. The instruments were designed for the purpose of doctoral dissertation examining attitudes of teachers and professors from Serbian universities towards certain aspects of the English language as a lingua franca. The instruments represent a combi-

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2 A part of the research carried out for the purpose of the doctoral dissertation *The Concept of the English Language as Lingua Franca and Its Perception in Serbian Academic Community* (Belgrade, Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade) was used in this paper.

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nation of a survey and five-degree Likert scale. The obtained data were subjected to descriptive statistics, while the differences between groups were tested by using χ^2 (chi-square) and t-test for independent samples.

The results show that the vast majority of respondents, both English language teachers and students within the Serbian academic community favor the concept of teaching the culture of native English speakers. Students themselves do not pay much attention to culture as a part of the English language learning, no matter whether it is the culture of native or non-native English speakers. On the other hand, the results of the research suggest a positive shift in attitudes of teachers towards the necessity of acquainting students with other cultures within the English language teaching. Nevertheless, according to the results, English language teachers in Serbia still prioritize Anglophone cultures in a much higher percentage.

Also, the students and teachers of the English teaching departments are more insistent on teaching Anglophone cultures thus showing lack of awareness of the significance of the issue in the context of social change. Such an attitude does not leave much room for critical thinking and inclusion of other cultures in English language pedagogy facilitating the achievement of intercultural competence.

Another conclusion is that the respondents would like to learn/teach English via situations and texts related to Serbian culture, which indicates a good starting point for innovations within the teaching process whose ultimate goal is students' achievement of intercultural competence.

The results of the research are data relevant for the analyses of the cultural aspects of English language teaching and the predominant role of Anglophone cultures in English language pedagogy. In accordance with contemporary social processes facilitating multilingualism and multiculturalism, the obtained data suggest the necessity of systematic work on gradual change of priorities in order to enable students to respond competently to the needs of international communication. The generally liberal attitude of the respondents to the introduction of different cultures including Serbian within English language teaching/learning might provide a solid base for changes related to the ELT goals and outcomes. In the first place, the priority of acquiring intercultural competence might gain a foothold in the local language policy decisions in line with the recommendations of the European Union, and reflect on pedagogical activities resulting in building intercultural along with linguistic competence.

Keywords: intercultural competence, cultures of Anglophone countries, interculturalism, English language teaching, attitudes.

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