



Methods of Developing Intercultural Competence in Maritime English Teaching

A.I. Kondratiev^{1,2,*}, I.O. Smirnov^{1,3}, B.B. Dokuto⁴

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 June 2016;
in revised form 15 July 2016;
accepted 31 July 2016.

Keywords:

Intercultural Communication,
Intercultural Competence, Intercultural
Awareness, Professional Interaction,
Human Element

© SEECMAR | All rights reserved

ABSTRACT

Intercultural communication which is realized, first of all, at the linguistic level is an inseparable part of seafarers' and offshore workers' professional activities. The objective of the present study consists in developing methods of forming and improving cadets' intercultural competence within the compulsory course of professional English taught at Admiral Ushakov Maritime State University. The study has attempted to incorporate the intercultural approach to the traditional course of the English language for seafarers, and work out original methods of the language intercultural competence development based on analyzing and modeling true-to-life on-board situations of intercultural interaction.

1. Introduction

The topicality of the paper is conditioned by the fact that a successful ability to communicate with representatives of foreign cultures, avoid and resolve conflicts caused by ethnic or cultural differences maintains safety and security on board, prevention of the sea pollution, fulfilling IMO Conventions, international and national law. Tolerant relationship among members of international crews and a tolerant attitude to foreign cooperation by linguistic means. Intercultural communication can be taught through building cadets' discursive activities and behavioral patterns.

¹Admiral Ushakov Maritime State University, 93 Lenina Avenue, 353918, Novorossiysk, Russia

²Professor of Maritime Technology, Director of the Institute of the Professional Development. Tel. 8 (8617) 76 79 01. E-mail Address: kaikondr@gmail.ru

³Professor of Maritime English of the Department of the English Language. Tel. 8 988 321 90 31. E-mail Address: Zeherd@yandex.ru

⁴Associate Professor of Philology of the Department of Theory and Translation at Novorossiysk Branch of Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University, 47 b Kunikova Street, 353920, Novorossiysk, Russia. Tel. 8 918 468 66 85. E-mail Address: bojena20009@rambler.ru

*Corresponding author: I. O. Smirnov. Tel. 8 988 321 90 31. E-mail Address: Zeherd@yandex.ru

The study has offered an original teaching technology including three methods of cadets' intercultural competence forming on which the corresponding language skills are based. The study has enabled us to select the language and speech material for topics having taken into account the criteria of authenticity. Section 2 of this article deals with a detailed analysis of the intercultural competence concept in the area of maritime language teaching. It also focuses on the triad of methods of its forming and developing in the course of Maritime English realized at Admiral Ushakov Maritime State University. Section 3 describes the results of applying the methods under consideration in the course of experimental teaching. Section 4 contains concluding remarks concentrating on the possible prospects of the further research into the ways of developing intercultural competence with cadets.

2. Development

2.1. Concept of Intercultural Competence in Maritime Language Teaching

The concept "competence" is defined as an intellectually and individually caused ability of the person to fulfill practical activities (Bardilovskaya S.A., Pakhirko V.V. 2014) or as a

substantial component of this ability in the form of knowledge, techniques, skills and possession experience (Sinitsina, U.A., 2002)

The notion of intercultural competence should be regarded in connection with the issue of the human factor, which, according to IMO recent studies, plays one of the leading roles in providing safety, security in the marine environment protection as well as in the industry development (Tenischeva V.F., Fishkova L.B., 2007). Defining a human factor as a physical or cognitive property of an individual or social behavior, which is specific to humans, everybody admits that it influences functioning of technological systems within a particular industry. Thus, being an integral constituent of the human element intercultural competence also promotes improved operational performance based on effective cross-cultural communication, and cultural awareness. It forms an ability to avoid or resolve conflicts, to work in a team, which limits the chance of human error.

The intercultural competence is an important component of modern training program of the future seaman. It is caused by the presence of an intercultural aspect in the professional work of the sea area expert involving the interaction of different cultures representatives and performing communicative functions.

Forming cadets' intercultural competence is necessary for the achievement of the consent within the limits of professional interaction, for resolving conflicts as the competence in question implies an ability to make a compromise and overcome communicative barriers. The importance of forming cadets' intercultural competence in the process of learning foreign languages is caused by the prospect of their work in a mixed crew, and the integration of Russia into the global economic space. A seaman should possess an ability to co-exist with representatives of other cultures in the common area on board a vessel, i.e. to be able and ready to build a constructive dialogue with all subjects of the space called a mixed crew.

The intercultural competence promotes achievement of mutual understanding in the course of intercultural communication. Nevertheless, there is still no unified approach to the definition of the intercultural competence.

While defining the concept of the intercultural competence, a number of foreign researchers single out some behavioral qualities of a person that make up the competence while communicating with representatives of other cultures (Wiseman, R.L., 2007).

However, such approach to the definition of intercultural competence does not consider a variety of cultural situations in which seamen can find themselves while dealing with representatives of other cultures. Besides, no cultural elements, knowledge of language or cultural facts are included in this definition. In our opinion, no formation of the intercultural competence may be provided unless a person has a set of behavioral qualities, including a cognitive component.

Most foreign scholars have proposed to define the intercultural competence as an ability to reach equally successful understanding of both representatives of other cultures and representatives of their own culture. They distinguish three components of this ability: knowledge of models and communicative

actions and their interpretation both in one's own culture, and in a foreign culture, and also in a language; general knowledge of relations between culture and communication, including distinctive features of national mentality; a set of strategies for interaction stabilization, i.e. for solving problems arising during communication (Alvino E. Fantini, 2000).

A number of Russian scholars define intercultural competence as knowledge of vital habits, customs, traditions, social standards which build up group and individual norms; individual motivations, forms of behavior, non-verbal components (gestures, mimicry), national-cultural traditions, system of values (Kurkina A.U., 2015). From this point of view, one of the components of intercultural training is teaching tolerance to a variety of other cultures and readiness to question your own norms (Fayvisovich A., Makashina I., Truschenko I., 2015).

The fullest model of intercultural competence covers different qualities, abilities and skills of a person. According to this model, the intercultural competence consists of five components: relations, knowledge, abilities to interpret and correlate, abilities to discover and interact, critical comprehension of culture (Kurkina A.U., 2015).

The base for building relations between representatives of various cultures with high level of the intercultural competence should be the readiness to refuse prejudice against other cultures.

Russian instructors of intercultural communication define intercultural competence as a person's ability of self-realization within the frame of the cross-cultural dialogue, which consists of three components:

- Pragmatic (practical skills of a foreign language);
- Cognitive (awareness of your own and foreign cultures);
- Affective (empathy and tolerance) (Bardilovskaya S.A., Pakhirko V.V. 2014, Kurkina A.U., 2015, Malkhanova I.A., 2006, Dokuto B.B., Dubovsky U.A., Pereyashkina, 2013, Ter-Minasova S. G., 2000).

The presented definitions and models of the intercultural competence enable us to conclude the following: the intercultural competence is a complicated entity that contains the following components: features of thinking, relations, knowledge, and abilities, all of which belong both to native and foreign cultures.

Having analyzed the above-mentioned approaches the present study have concluded that intercultural competence, on the one hand, is a complex comprising awareness of your own and foreign cultures, skills to interpret cultural phenomena as well as individual emotional and psychological features. On the other hand, it contains a communicative element including linguistic, strategic, pragmatic and social skills.

2.2. The Triad of Intercultural Competence Developing Methods in Training Seamen in the Course of Maritime English

The analysis of the compulsory professional English language course and Basics of Business Etiquette course taught at Admiral Ushakov Maritime State University conducted in the

present study has shown that they span most components of intercultural competence in the form of knowledge and skills. We suggest applying a triad of methods that, in our opinion, work best in forming intercultural competence of future ship officers. The triad consists of three methods: SWOT analysis, a professional cross-cultural mini-project and a method of training. This triad has proved quite effective in Maritime English teaching at Admiral Ushakov Maritime State University and can work quite efficiently in instructing cadets on work in mixed crews.

Thus, the initial stage of intercultural competence development involves SWOT analysis. SWOT analysis (Strengths - Weaknesses - Opportunities - Threats) is a structured planning method used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats involved in a project or in a business venture. In terms of intercultural competence it can be applied to studying the topic of Eastern and Western Cultures. Cadets investigate cultural similarities and differences of Eastern and Western Cultures with the purpose to predict possible soft and hard issues that enable them to work out future opportunities and deal with potential problems in particular situations of professional communication in a mixed crew. The analysis covers the following subtopics: history, geography, economics, industrial and natural resources, art and cultural heritage, shipping industry.

At the second stage of the intercultural competence forming process cadets prepare a professional mini project. The method of mini project may also be used to form cadets' intercultural competence within the scope of Maritime English course. It enables trainees to project their pragmatic, linguistic sociological and psychological strategies in the context of solving concrete professional problems based on their own and foreign cultures awareness and skills of cultural distinctions interpretation as well as their communication partners' emotional and psychological features interpretation formed within the course of training.

The mini project is aimed at accomplishing practical tasks, related to the professional work of a seaman and reflects a great variety of topics in different communicative situations such as pilotage, mooring, cargo operations, emergency drills, shifting, bunkering, oil spill response drills, etc.

Projecting the above-stated communicative situations of professional activities involves the description of the following basic steps:

Step I consists in analyzing scientific literature on a mini project topic, revealing possible sources of cultural discrepancies.

Step II includes selecting basic lexical units of Maritime English including the corresponding terminology.

Step III implies the systematization of grammatical structures of the English language potentially involved in modeling texts related to the project topic.

Step IV means developing communicative formulas applicable in situations corresponding to the mini project topic.

Step V assumes the generalization of the strategies which can be applied by seamen while performing professional duties in the context of the mini project topic.

The application of the mini project in the English language course has proved that this method provides cadets with the following skills:

1. To conduct an intercultural professionally focused dialogue at a high level of foreign language competence;
2. To cooperate with representatives of foreign cultures taking into account their national values, norms and conceptions;
3. To create a positive spirit in a professionally focused dialogue in English;
4. To choose communicatively appropriate ways of verbal and non-verbal behavior based on knowledge of culture of other crewmembers;
5. To keep national self-identification amid international integration and mobility

The third stage in the triad involves a method of language psychological training (Malkhanova I.A., 2013). Training prepares seamen to be ready to diagnose and analyze concrete situations of intercultural dialogue and to generate all available knowledge and skills of verbal and non-verbal dialogue in English to overcome conflict situations and effectively interact onboard and ashore. The experimental study has demonstrated that Basics of Business Etiquette course taught at Admiral Ushakov Maritime State University provides students with communicative strategies in the frame of typical on board and ashore situations.

Such training is classified as a cultural-specific training which intentionally prepares a person to communicate within this or that concrete culture. It is a cognitive training as it gives the information on another culture (Pugachov V.P., 2001). On the other hand, it can be characterized as a behavioral one as it instructs on practical skills of interaction in a mixed crew. Besides, it is of an attributive character as it explains how representatives of different ethnics groups and cultures interpret behavior and results of performance from the point of view of other cultures. Training should result in the formation of experience of tolerance and consideration of other cultures values. Each section in the English language course provides cadets with information, regards communicative strategy in a concrete situation of professional interaction, equips them with bilingual speech formulas, which serve the concrete situation and suggests applying this knowledge and skills in practice. The last task is called animation, a kind of a role-play, for example:

Your goal is to negotiate on putting vessel "Star" for repair in port Mumbai so that your proposals are accepted. Use the offered speech stimulus, taking into account the national-cultural features of the country.

Practical experience in carrying out personal and psychological trainings in English with cadets enables us to mark out this training as one of the most effective methods of preparation ship officers to perform their duties successfully on board and ashore, as it:

- Combines informational and practical aspects;
- Develops an ability to build an effective model of mutual relations with partners - representatives of different cultures in communication, to prevent and structurally resolve conflicts in a mixed crew;
- Promotes formation of an openness and readiness to accept intercultural distinctions;
- Develops tolerance to representatives of different cultures;
- Allows to fix skills of intercultural communications within English course with no natural foreign environment around.

3. Results

As it was mentioned above, the triad of methods under consideration has been tested in the course of experimental teaching. The latter included three phases: a diagnostic check of cadets' intercultural awareness, experimental integrating of SWOT analysis, professional mini project as well as language psychological training in the maritime English language course and the final check of cadets' intercultural competence at the end of the course.

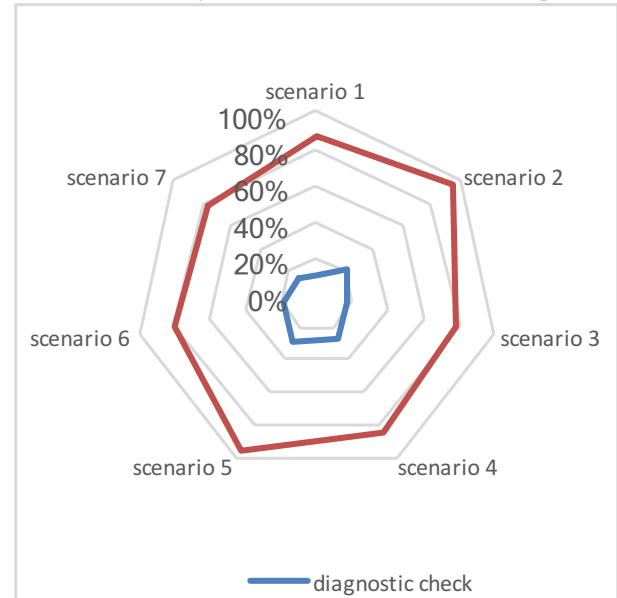
At the initial stage, cadets were to fulfill professional problem - solution tasks which were presented in the form of professionally conditioned scenarios typical of a mixed crew. The tasks contained intercultural competence elements and, therefore, required the use of intercultural awareness and skills. The analysis of the diagnostic test showed that cadets lacked both knowledge of cross-cultural specificity and an ability to react to such communicative challenges.

The second stage consisted in building the triad of the intercultural competence forming methods under discussion in the maritime English language course.

At the final stage, cadets were given a series of real - professional life situations in which they were to process information implying cultural distinctions and make decisions leading to a successful communicative outcome. The situations were identical to the situations of the initial check. The comparison with the results of the initial check has displayed cadets' acquired skills to size up and pattern their behavior in a varied socio - cultural environment. Thus, the results of the final check have allowed us to note cadets' improved intercultural awareness as one can see in Figure 1. The diagram presents a significantly enlarged area of cadets' intercultural competence after training with the application of the methods triad under discussion.

Summing up it is necessary to emphasize the results of the final check serve as evidence that the triad of methods tested in the course of the conducted experiment have proved to be an effective tool of forming future officers' intercultural competence. They have demonstrated their acquired abilities to comprehend foreign cultures' phenomena, to apply to their own cultural background, to recognize, analyze and interpret elements of foreign cultures in the verbal and non-verbal context. Basing on the results of the experiment, we can claim the efficiency of the suggested triad of methods has been proved. So we hope

Figure 1: The diagnostic and final checks results compared



Source: Authors

the choice of strategies as well as sequence of stages can be of interest to all scholars involved in the process of training or retraining sailors in the framework of cross-cultural context, which contributes to targeting the industry's problems related to the field of the human element.

4. Conclusions

By way of conclusion, it is necessary to highlight that verbal and non-verbal communication in a mixed crew aimed at dealing with situations of professional interaction on board and ashore implies intercultural competence realization. Since intercultural competence is an integral part of human element, it promotes the task of maintaining safety, security and marine environmental protection in the industry. It should be regarded with the view of the development of cadets' ability to communicate in English taking into consideration differences in national cultures and mentality relying on the principles of mutual respect, tolerance and readiness to overcome national barriers.

Intercultural competence in the course of maritime English can be formed with cadets by means of a special teaching technology involving a triad of methods in the following sequence: SWOT analysis of different cultures, professional mini-project and language-psychological training.

The first two methods provide cadets with awareness of different types of cultures, types of communication, its functions, and ways of resolving conflicts, international cooperation and prospects of the shipping industry.

The method of language-psychological training enables cadets to foster skills of intercultural cooperation in simulated situations of professional communication.

The results of the study can be applied in developing textbooks and teaching materials not only for seafarers, but also for offshore workers, who form multinational and multilingual

community uniting representatives of various cultures for whom English is the main means of communication.

All the methods described in the present study are implemented at Admiral Ushakov Maritime State University and meets the requirements of the Model Courses of STCW Convention as amended.

It is hoped that the results of the study can have a certain value for research into the human factor in the shipping industry and promote to safety, security and environment protection elements both on board and ashore.

References

- A., F., Makashina, I., Truschenko, I., (2015). Joint educational programs within the frame of bsami: conditions, problems, prospects. Science and Technology for Sustainable Maritime Development: International Scientific Conference. Varna.
- Alvino E. Fantini., (2000). A central concern: Developing intercultural competence. URL: <http://www.adam-europe.eu/>
- Bardilovskaya S.A., Pakhirko V.V., (2014). Intercultural competence building. Management in Social and Economic Systems: XXIII International Scientific-Practical Conference, Minsk., pp 195–196.
- Dokuto B.B., Dubovsky U.A., Pereyashkina L.N., (2013). Basics of effective communication. Pyatigorsk. Pyatigorsk University Press.
- Kurkina A.U., (2015). Methods of intercultural competence developing in teaching foreign cultures' modern press discourse. Moscow: Moscow State Linguistic University.
- Malkhanova I.A., (2006). Communicative training. Moscow. Akademicheskyy Project.
- Pugachov V.P., (2001). Tests, role plays, trainings in personnel management. Moscow. Aspekt Press.
- Sinitsina, U.A., (2002). Intercultural communicative competence: Requirements for level of possession and some ways of its formation. Foreign Languages at school.
- Tenischeva V.F., Fishkova L.B., (2007). Basics of business etiquette. linguistic and psychological trainings in english. Novorossiysk. Admiral Ushakov University Press.
- Ter-Minasova, S. G., (2000). Language and intercultural communication. Moscow. Slovo.
- Wiseman, R., (2001). Intercultural communication competence.