Panchyshyn S. B.
Senior Lecturer of the Department of Foreign Language,
Lviv National Environmental University

Dobrovolska S. R.
Candidate of Economic Sciences (PhD), acting associate professor,
Chief of the Department of Foreign Language,
Lviv National Environmental University

Opyr M. B.
Senior Lecturer of the Department of Foreign Languages,
Lviv National Environmental University

ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF CROSSCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Language is the medium that is applied in communication. It plays a critical role in understanding the various concepts that relate to a given community. As noted by Fisher [1] language is a communication tool that promotes interpersonal communication. On the other hand, Solomon and Schell [7] noted that language enhances understanding of the self and informs preconceptions. In the intercultural setting, language plays a significant role in permeating the social boundaries through seamless interactions with the locals. However, lack of knowledge about the indigenous language does not limit the interactions.

In time of globalization, cross-cultural communication is a field of study that looks at how people from differing cultural backgrounds communicate, in similar and different ways among themselves, and how they communicate across cultures. According to Laponce [3], the world has increasingly become interconnected due to technological advancement and new means of communication. Even though globalisation has not erased the cultural divergences, a multi-dimensional hybridisation of cultures has taken place across the globe.

The Internet and modern technology have opened up new marketplaces, and allow to promote businesses to new geographic locations and cultures. And given that it can now be as easy to work with people remotely as it is to work face-to-face, cross-cultural communication is increasingly growing. Nowadays, we communicate with the help of e-mailing, chatting, blogging, webbrowsing besides speaking and writing. In these days of global

networking, we are thrown into the society of deterritorialized, hybrid, changing and conflicting cultures, where we are expected to become pluricultural individuals.

Effective communication with people of different cultures is especially challenging. In the contemporary world, there is flexibility in the communication, and there are international languages that have been embraced in the various spheres of the world. The cultural integration and resulting hybridisation have been experienced at the global level and the local level [4].

There are many ways to understand the nature of culture, general or specific. Researchers and cultural commentators have identified different dimensions as a method of analysing and describing what is happening [2]. Dimensions are perspectives which allow us to measure and compare certain attributes of different cultures, although it must always be remembered that other cultures may see these attributes quite differently. Different researchers have arrived at a range of dimensions:

High context versus low context – in a high-context culture, members use the context itself as a means of communication. This means that they do not need to explain things explicitly which are readily available from the situation, or from the environment. Often, they use non-verbal behaviour, value long-term relationships, and work with spoken rather than written agreements. In low-context cultures, things need to be communicated much more explicitly – people often appear direct and dislike ambiguity. Outsiders may find it relatively easy to become a member of the group. The business manager from a low-context culture will value long, detailed contracts, which are, of course, adhered to once signed. After all, that is the point of a written agreement. For the high context business manager, the contract may be seen as more of a guideline, to be used for further discussion if need be. After all, flexibility is paramount. Or imagine a situation where a visitor has arrived after a long journey. The high-context host might suggest that the visitor takes time to rest and recuperate, whereas the low-context host might expect an explicit statement of tiredness before making the same offer.

Time – in **monochronic** cultures, time is seen as linear, with one event following another. Members of **polychronic** cultures, on the other hand, are able to manage different activities at once. This might influence the way a meeting is run, for example. The person from the polychronic culture might spend the meeting doing various things like making phone calls, talking to different people, and so on. The monochronic person would feel more comfortable dealing with the matters at hand, in sequence, one after the other.

Power distance – this refers to the distance or equality between individuals in a hierarchy. In a low-power distance culture people find it easy to approach their leaders, to discuss issues, and even to criticize them.

Managers are likely to consult subordinates. In a high-power distance culture, the opposite happens. Subordinates are likely to do what they are told, and there is little discussion.

Uncertainty avoidance – this dimension reflects how different cultures approach ambiguity and uncertainty.

Individualism versus collectivism – some cultures see individualism and competition as important attributes. In certain societies, for example, the individual's willingness to have different opinions, to react against authority, to stand up for his or her rights, is prized. In a more collectivist society, conformity and loyalty are rated more highly.

Masculinity versus femininity – in masculine cultures, achievement is often measured in terms of power and wealth, and emphasis placed on work goals and assertiveness. Feminine cultures see personal goals, human contact, and relationship building as more valuable.

Long-term orientation – this dimension highlights differences between cultures that see short-term benefits as important, and those that feel that time spent developing longer-lasting relationships brings greater benefit.

Universalism versus particularism – the universalist says that rules and regulations are there to be followed. The particularist would argue that it depends on the situation and people involved. If a cashier is caught stealing from the till, in a universalist culture he or she would probably lose their job. In a particularistic culture the fact that the person was stealing to pay for a child's education might be seen as an excuse for the behaviour.

Neutral versus emotional – this dimension looks at how people show emotions in various situations. So, a more neutral culture would pride itself on staying calm and in control in the face of chaos and confusion, whereas a more emotional culture might give vent to feelings which are, after all, part of human nature.

Specific versus diffuse – in specific-oriented cultures, the relationship between the manager and the subordinate depends on the situation where the relationship is taking place. The 'at-work' relationship is different from the 'at-play' one. In diffuse cultures, the relationship is always there, and business can be done at any time or place.

Status – different cultures accord status in different ways. We can say, simplistically, that in Japan, for example, age is treated with respect whereas in the US achievement is regarded as more important.

Relationship with nature – some cultures believe that the environment can be controlled, whereas others see themselves as part of the environment. This might influence the way people accept technology, for example, or how they work with plans (can business plans really influence what happens in the market place, or are they simply a reflection of what is already happening?).

Researchers have looked at other dimensions too [5]. The way different cultures use **non-verbal communication** is particularly interesting. Here we can look at body language **(kinesics),** eye movement and contact **(occulistics),** touch **(haptics),** and body distance **(proxemics).**

If we look at speaking, **paralanguage** (the way we vary tone, pitch, volume, and speed of talking) can also be quite different between cultures.

To make conclusions, it is important to teach our students cross-cultural values and attitudes and their impact on how we communicate across cultures. The culture can be analysed using a number of different dimensions. We can improve our learners' intercultural competence by using various activities to facilitate understanding of their own culture, increase their awareness of cultural differences, and analyse critical incidents.

The world has become interconnected. There have been increased acceptances of a global culture driven by internationally accepted languages that are used as the basis of interactions in various international forums. Even though language plays an imperative role in cross-cultural interactions, various dimensions of globalisation and technology provide alternatives to interactions.

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