

In addition to the great number of surveys, investigations, and research projects conducted in recent decades that deal with various aspects of intercultural communication we are now experiencing an abundance of publications the number of which would appear to have multiplied in recent years.

Some of these publications simply show the relevance of intercultural communication in a globalized world. Others try to demonstrate the means and tools for mastering intercultural communication often combined with training programs that facilitate the acquisition of intercultural competence.

The fact that such training is absolutely necessary today has been shown in a number of publications which demonstrate the dangers that lie in intercultural misunderstanding such as Samuel Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996) or the anthology of critical essays entitled *Globalization and Civilizations* (Mozaffari 2002) as well as Thomas Meyer's book on politics of identity and the misuse of cultural differences (2002) and Richard Lewis' book on *The Cultural Imperative* (2003) or the anthology with the rather simple title *Cultural Matters* which focuses on the problems regarding cultural values (Huntington 2000). The title of the book is somewhat more poignant in its German translation *Streit um Werte* (2002).

Much of the intercultural awareness reflected in recent publications focuses on the cultural differences between *the* two continents with the largest cultural heritage which is deeply rooted in beliefs, customs and the behavior of their peoples: that is Asia and Europe. Thus, it is not surprising that a recent anthology bears the significant title *Asia in Europe – Europe in Asia* (Ravi 2004).

Aside from general studies on intercultural communication, a great number of studies and – in consequence – of publications deal with specific areas of intercultural communication. How detailed such specific areas can be is shown in a book published just a month ago by Vassileva (2006) in which she depicts the intercultural aspects of presenting oneself in scientific discourse. In this context culture-based behavior becomes more evident today due to the globalization of science and has led to linguists' growing interest in conference language. Vassileva's study investigates the basic

means of speaker-audience interaction and author self-representation.

The results shed new light on the differences between the written and the spoken modes of academic communication as well as the cross-cultural conflicts resulting in misunderstandings that arise from the variations, the formation and the representation of author identity. All this is due to culture-specific norms, traditions, beliefs, dominant ideologies and other features of society as well as the realization of intertextuality in conference language, a re-definition of the notion of 'academic discourse community' in view of its constant expansion and the ever-increasing multiplication of voices within it.

Other areas of intercultural research are literature, religion, integration of immigrants, history and political science, diplomacy, regional identity, cultural fragmentation and of course traveling and tourism, including the identification and – possibly – the explanation of stereotypes and clichés.

There is indeed one area in which people have very clearly recognized the value of skills in intercultural communication and the supreme importance of being aware of cultural differences - the area of international trade and commerce. Business people have always realized the importance of the 'customer's language' (and culture).

At this point one might be reminded of the question presented to Jakob Fugger, a well known merchant and learned man of the 15th century. When he was asked which of the languages he thought was best, he gave a clear cut answer without hesitation: The best language is the language of the customer.

Europeans sensed the need to cope with this problem at a very early stage. This is not surprising in a multilingual continent that is trying to establish a political union on the basis of the treaties signed in Rome exactly 50 years ago. A large number of languages are spoken on this rather small continent. In the EU alone, about 60 languages are spoken today of which only 20 are official languages of the EU.

Since most European companies are engaged in some form of international partnership – be it acquisitions, mergers, joint ventures, strategic alliances,

bi-lateral projects, be it simply buying and selling through agents abroad – they have all recognized the necessity to improve their linguistic and intercultural skills in general, and in particular, "a growing need for managers with international skills as well as mobility". Several surveys have been conducted on this topic. They all provide sufficient evidence that the linguistic map of Europe is characterized by a high degree of variation across different countries.

In a survey conducted by the organizers of the famous language fair *Expolangues* in Paris in December 1996 an average of 51% declared that they were able to speak at least one foreign language. The French and the Italians lead with 61% and 56% respectively followed by the Germans with 49% and the British and the Spanish with 44% and 43% respectively.

The survey also revealed a wide range of foreign languages: among the foreign languages spoken by the group in question were English (52%), French (39%), German (35%), Italian (26%) and Spanish (23%). All other languages accounted for less than 3%. The data thus show that English is the most widely spoken foreign language, but not necessarily the undisputed *lingua franca* in practice.

This 'broad brush' picture drawn by the *Expolangues* survey shows the knowledge of languages in general; one should, however, take a closer look at more detailed surveys which demonstrate language use and language needs in business. Furthermore, one should keep in mind that the *Expolangues* survey was conducted in Western Europe, in France, while surveys including countries in Eastern Central Europe might show a slightly different picture in terms of language use and language needs in small and medium-sized companies.

Statistical data - as a combination of various surveys, samples and other sources - taken from the 6 largest old member countries of the EU and the 3 largest new member countries demonstrate that English is foreign language number one in European companies, but not the only one. After English comes German and French, followed at some distance by Spanish and Italian. All other languages play a marginal role; the importance of their use depends largely on the geographical site of the company and on their products as well

as on customer distribution in Europe and in the rest of the world.

According to this summary of surveys (cf. fig. 1)

1. English is the first foreign language in use in 2/3 of the countries and second in all other countries.
2. French and German are about equal in the UK and in Italy.
3. English and German are about equal in Poland, Hungary, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic.
4. German and Spanish are about equal in France.

	GB	DE	FR	ES	IT	NL	CZ	HU	PL
English	-	93	81	77	79	95	84	88	95
German	53	-	40	20	45	91	90	95	72
French	59	53	-	57	52	51	23	11	15
Spanish	27	17	38	-	10	16	5	2	2
Italian	17	31	16	13	-	16	7	8	9
Dutch	6	0	2	2	3	-	1	1	1
Russian	0	2	0	0	0	1	4	8	5
Portuguese	5	0	2	14	3	2	0	0	0
Czech	0	4	0	0	0	0	-	1	1
Croatian	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	3	0
Chinese	4	0	2	0	0	1	1	3	2
Japanese	6	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1
Hungarian	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	-	1
Polish	0	5	0	0	0	1	1	2	-

Fig. 1: Use of languages in companies

The need for language training - both in English and predominantly in the two other major languages (German and French) - has led to the development of specific training courses and learning materials for business language. Globalization has thus made business language the most expanding LSP in practical teaching.

A successful appointment of leading managers abroad requires previous preparatory training which includes, in addition to language skills and knowledge about the target country or area, a cultural sensitivity combined with the competence to identify and explain culture-specific behavior as well as the ability to handle culture-generated misunderstandings and – hopefully – solve culture-generated conflicts.

Whereas many of these publications aim for a global outlook, a large number of publications deal with cultural diversity in Europe. In the EU, which has one common currency, a single market, free trade and the freedom to choose the living and working place – in a union where customs boundaries and inter-state trade restrictions have been abolished language and culture barriers still remain.

This might account for the fact that a great number of studies deal with the European integration process. From an Asian point of view, the cultural differences within Europe might be considered rather minute. From a European point of view, however, great differences are felt by the citizens of the EU member countries. This basically pertains to all culture and language groups in Europe. Let me take the German one as an example.

Fig. 2: Number of Inhabitants of the 25 EU Member Countries (Millions)

DE = Germany, FR = France, GB = Great Britain, IT = Italy, ES = Spain, PL = Poland, NL = Netherlands, GR = Greece, PT = Portugal, BE = Belgium, CZ = Czech Republic, HU = Hungary, SE = Sweden, AT = Austria, DK = Denmark, SK = Slovak Republic, FI = Finland, IE = Ireland, LT = Lithuania, LV = Latvia, SI = Slovenia, EE = Estonia, CY = Cyprus, LU = Luxemburg, MT = Malta

Fig. 3: GNP of the 25 EU Member Countries (in Million Euros)

The fact that Germany is not only the largest but also the economically most powerful member country in the EU, has caused a number of scholars to analyze intercultural matters with regard to Germany and the Germans. Among them there are a number of American publications such as *The German Way. Aspects of Behavior, Attitudes, and Customs in the German-Speaking World* (Flippo 1999) or – to mention an older one – *Business Germany. A Practical Guide to Understanding German Business Culture* (Kenna / Lacy 1994) as well as British publications such as *Doing Business with Germany* (Millar 1997) or – again an older one – *The Business Culture in Germany. Portray of a Power House* (Randlesome 1994).

Publications of this kind are of course not restricted to the English speaking world. There are similar publications in Italian, Spanish, Russian, Japanese and other languages. Among them is a French publication with the intriguing

title *Savoir vivre avec les allemands. Un guide interculturel* (Mrosowski 2003). No less interesting is the book by Béatrice Durand (2004). And since we are here in Taiwan one book has to be mentioned: a book on the relevance of images in economy and the change of the German image in Taiwan by Daniel Tsann-Ching Lo (2005).

In this context it should be noted that Germany has become the number-one-country in Europe for Chinese students - both from Taiwan and from the mainland. Today about 40.000 Chinese study at German universities which makes the Chinese the largest group of foreign students in Germany.

It is therefore not surprising that such a great number of students from one culture generates not only general interest but also academic studies, even a dissertation on academic training of Chinese students in Germany presented by Hong Meng (2005). In her interdisciplinary study, the author not only sheds light on the historical background of the matter but also deals with the socio-cultural aspects of studying in a foreign country, with the integration of Chinese students in German society and with the reintegration in their homeland. She develops a model for the professionalization of foreign study and underlines the importance of foreign study for the creation of multipliers in the era of globalization.

These are only a few examples of publications based on previous research and observations. All of this shows how interesting the issue is and how important it seems to be to those dealing with intercultural communication and working in this field. The question remains, however: What can be learned from them and how can we put their findings into practice?

Examples on how such findings can contribute to the implementation of training courses and to the development of practical teaching and learning materials that are aimed at training culture together with language since both are inextricably bound together have been on the market for quite some time.

Teaching materials for business language have developed into the fastest growing segment of LSP teaching worldwide. Teaching materials for business German were first developed in the US and in France in the mid-80s, later in the UK and in Finland, and during the previous decade in

Germany as well. However, there exists a great diversity in volume, content, approach, learning goal and prerequisites within this group of materials. In terms of approach these materials may roughly be grouped into three categories:

1. text-oriented materials
2. subject-oriented materials
3. communication-oriented materials.

Within the first category the teaching units are centered around texts taken from business publications in the target language and are designed to develop mainly reading skills combined with a detailed understanding of the economy and business life of the respective country or language area.

The second category focuses on the language of business administration and economics. Thus, it tries to combine subject knowledge with language skills. It is an excellent preparation for those who want to study or continue their studies in this field at a university in the target area and perhaps later join the staff of a company there, or in their home country doing business in the target area.

Materials of the third category were developed rather late (at the beginning of the 90s), at least in Germany. Their texts, graphs, exercises and explanations reflect the language interaction in a business company and give preference to dialogs and thus a certain emphasis on the spoken language. The first textbook of this type to appear on the German market was *Deutsch im Beruf: Wirtschaft* (Kelz / Neuf 1991) which is now in its 3rd edition.

Almost all of the already existing textbooks were intended for intermediate and advanced learners with a good basic knowledge of the target language. Not so the course material aforementioned. It was indeed the first textbook for learners with no previous knowledge of German, but with experience in business firms in their home country. Until its publication it was widely believed that an LSP in general and a business language in particular could only be learned after acquiring basic knowledge of the general language.

The use of the textbook in question in LSP courses for beginners has, however, proven that this is by no means necessary. In addition to that, the

acceptance of the textbook on the language training market has revealed that there is a need for such material due to the fact that many business people who never had the chance to learn German at school or elsewhere felt it necessary to have some knowledge of the language for business, especially in customer relations.

This is not really surprising: one of the questions in a study conducted by the *Goethe-Institut* in July 1998 was why people learned German. As expected, the majority did not claim that they wanted to read Goethe in the original, but rather – depending on the region – between 60% and 85% claimed that they learned it for professional reasons. Obviously, a need is felt by those learners to get acquainted with the business language and to increase their intercultural competence.

The teaching material is, therefore, targeted at business people, i.e. people who are familiar with business life in their own country, but who do not speak any or sufficient German.

The texts reflect a number of business activities with specific communicative situations such as customer relations, ordering products, fixing prices and delivery terms, product presentation on exhibitions and fairs as well as in the media, marketing and advertising, direct sales and sales through agents abroad, transportation of goods by ship, rail, plane and truck, including insurance procedures and customs regulations, personnel management and production logistics, research and development of new products, invoicing and bookkeeping, financial planning and banking, patent application, legal forms of companies, conducting business meetings, and many more, including such specific German institutions like *betriebliche Mitbestimmung* as well as the language of an *Arbeitszeugnis*.

In all these facets of business life the focus is on the language, the communicative behavior and the cultural background. This includes the special language of technical description, the language and the formalities of business correspondence, as well as the language of formal meetings, jargon at the work place and even small talk.

For didactic reasons the various aspects of business life and the

demonstration of in-house communication and inter-company communication are embedded in a story subdivided into 24 units. Each of these units presents a problem: on the one hand it serves as a stimulus for creative speech acts and as a basis for discussion in the learning group. On the other hand, the learning group is looking forward to the following unit in which the problem is solved in one way or another.

The story is basically situated in one company, as well as in partner firms; it is not a company idealized by fiction, but a real, existing company. The primary criteria for choosing this particular company as a model were the following:

1. It had to be a medium-sized company.
2. It had to be a company with world-wide sales.
3. It had to be a company that is still largely owned by one person.
4. It had to manufacture and sell a product that everyone knows but no one, i.e. no individual consumer, can buy.

A company with these features was found in Fürth, South Germany. Its major products are hot stamping foils that are used on all kinds of industrial products and are never bought by the end customer. Among the foils are metal foils for cars (brand name, front, etc.) and hi-fi appliances, furniture foils on wood, holographic foils, foils for book covers, magnetic foils for bank and credit cards, etc., as well as the security stripe on bank notes. The company developed from a small craftsman's workshop in the latter part of the 19th century - then dealing mostly with gold foils - into an enterprise with over 1500 workers, still being owned predominantly by one family. It has one large factory in Fürth that well reflects the growth of the company and a modern plant outside the city. It has one subsidiary in Hastings PA and a network of about 150 sales agents and representatives around the globe.

In order to find out how communication worked within the company and between the company and outsiders (customers, company agents, subsidiaries, other companies and public agencies), a research project was conducted taking into account all sorts of written texts (customer information, advertisements, business correspondence, orders, invoices, memos, etc.), as well as oral communication, including phone calls.

In the process of the preparation of the learning materials described earlier a

number of problems had to be solved, of which only two should be mentioned here:

- (1) the problem of sequencing – since the language in the texts had to be fully authentic and not artificially reduced in vocabulary and/or grammar.
- (2) the intercultural problems and the problems of first language interference – since the material is targeted at anyone and not at a particular group of learners with a common language or the same cultural background.

The first problem was basically solved by using elliptic sentences that are very common in spoken German, particularly in well-delimited settings such as business environments, and by introducing grammatical forms as lexical units.

In order to cope with the fact that the material is intended for learners of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, a compendium was prepared for each of the major languages of the prospective learners. Apart from a glossary listing every word in the order of its first occurrence, the compendium contains a number of commentaries with cultural information and problems of usage, information on German life and institutions relevant for business life – as well as grammar and lexical problems, spelling and pronunciation, pragmatics and style.

To sum up, the following five points should be emphasized:

1. There are predominantly three languages of importance in the business environment – at least in Europe: English, German and French.
2. There is a need for adequate language learning materials for those in business because they can best relate their knowledge of products and their company culture to outsiders.
3. It is not only possible, but also viable to introduce the LSP of business to learners without any previous knowledge of the target language.
4. The input of language data should and can be authentic – they will be, especially if excerpted from real business settings – in order to serve as a basis for illustrating language use.
5. Problems of interference both – in terms of what can be detected and predicted by contrastive and/or error analyses, as well as in terms of intercultural problems – have to be considered and incorporated into the learning material. The same applies to positive transfer.

The final goal of such training is, therefore, not only to learn how to make

oneself understood but also to learn to understand each other.

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