

Language Education for European Citizenship

Nikolina Tsvetkova

Abstract: The paper focuses on a review of recent studies in the field of language education through the lens of developing intercultural communicative competence and active citizenship skills. It discusses the results of some recent research done by the author into the readiness of secondary English language teachers to implement EU-related topics and develop ICC and active citizenship skills and into the potential of the newly introduced educational standards, syllabi and just-published school books for teaching English at primary and secondary level to contribute to this process. It also argues the need to create the conditions for an educational continuum on a national level in order to utilize the potential of language education to contribute effectively to developing European citizenship skill at all levels (from primary to tertiary).

Key words: intercultural communicative competence, intercultural citizenship, language education.

Introduction

Languages have always occupied a special place in human life in general and in education more specifically. One of the motives for pursuing language proficiency has always been related to the need to communicate across borders and, respectively, to the opportunity to do so by effective (even if not proficient) language use. Today, with the more and more affordable transnational transport and the practically limitless affordances of modern ICTs, this need and the accompanying opportunities are especially intensified. The result is that more and more people participate in various forms of ideas and information exchange and they often have to do this in languages different from their mother tongue with representatives of different cultures, from different regions of our continent and even of the world. The above processes are often related to study and labour mobility although they are not restricted to experiences of visiting another country only.

That is why among the major tasks of modern language education is preparing learners to communicate skillfully, appropriately and competently in a variety of contexts. Successful communication requires taking into consideration various factors such as the specific context of

the interaction, the roles of the participants and their relationship, the message aim, etc. Successful communication also relies on using both linguistic and extra-linguistic means which are, above all, appropriate to the particular situation (Byram M, Gribkova B & Starkey H, 2002: 5) [1]. A lot of researchers working in the field of linking language learning to preparing students for the challenges of the globalizing world and intensified interactions between representatives of different cultures in the last decades of the 20th century (see for example Damen, 1987, Kramsch, 1993; Seelye, 1998, Byram 1997, Byram and Risager, 1999, Roberts et. al., 2000 among others) [2] tackled this issue although in different ways. It is possible to trace a development of ideas from articulating the need for language teaching to include teaching culture to defending the view that language teaching should also be aiming at the purposeful development of learners' intercultural communicative competence (ICC), the latter referring not only to school language education but to learning languages at university level as well. In recent years, the focus has been shifted from ICC towards the need to use language teaching as a vehicle of developing active citizenship skills (Byram, 2001, Byram 2008, Porto, 2014). [3]

Language education, intercultural communicative competence, intercultural citizenship. European perspectives

When discussing modern language education from a European perspective, we cannot miss to emphasise the importance of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) [4] as a language-neutral tool in creating transparency and comparability of language teaching and assessment. The framework is also a powerful instrument of innovation in language teaching across Europe and beyond. This is due to its openness and flexibility as well as to the fact that it is not tied in with a particular didactic or pedagogical theory, concrete situation or context. As Stoicheva (2006) [5] puts it, the CEFR is based on a more general, activity based communicative approach focusing on communicative language competence and its linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic components and communication and learning strategies. Furthermore, the CEFR views language and culture learning as one whole and the languages and cultures one learns or acquires are seen to form a complex whole, the constituent elements of which influence one another. Thus "...the learner of a second or foreign language and culture does not cease to be competent in his or her mother tongue and the associated culture. Nor is the new competence kept entirely separate from the old. The learner does not simply acquire two distinct,

unrelated ways of acting and communicating. The language learner becomes *plurilingual* and develops *interculturality*. The linguistic and cultural competences in respect of each language are modified by knowledge of the other and contribute to intercultural awareness, skills and know-how. They enable the individual to develop an enriched, more complex personality and an enhanced capacity for further language learning and greater openness to new cultural experiences.” (CEFR: 43) [6].

This framework has led to a number of results, among which:

- the creation of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) which helps learners assess their linguistic and cultural competences in all languages spoken by them;
- using one’s mother tongue as the basis for studying a second, third, etc. language;
- emphasising the importance of acquiring one’s language and culture as a source of better knowledge of other languages and cultures;
- encouraging intercomprehension;
- consciously developing learning to learn skills, etc. (Tsvetkova, 2013). [7]

Current research into intercultural competence sheds light on the crucial role of preparing students to engage and collaborate in a global society (Castle Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007) [8] by communicating successfully across cultures and learning languages creates a natural environment for doing so. This is in line with the model of intercultural communicative competence proposed by Byram in 1997, which comprises a complex entity of intercultural relations (*savoir être*), knowledge of social groups and practices in both the target and home cultures (*savoirs*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), critical cultural awareness (*savoir s’engager*), which consists of abilities to evaluate perspectives, practices and products of both home and target cultures (Byram:1997). [9] Far from the view that it is possible to teach students a strictly defined intercultural communicative competence (ICC), we rather accept Zarate’s view that it is often more appropriate to talk about intercultural communicative competences (ICC’s) – in the plural – due to the unstable development of ICC and to the fact that a high level of language proficiency does not automatically mean a high level of intercultural competences (Zarate 2003). [10]

Furthermore, in a European context, there has been a strong emphasis on intercultural dialogue for decades and in more recent years – on exploiting the potential of language education for developing what Byram (2008) [11] terms ‘intercultural citizenship’ which enables young people

to contribute to social cohesion at a local, national and European level. It should be noted that citizenship education has been seen as closely related to language education (Byram 2001, Starkey, 2002). [12] Thus learning a foreign language coupled with acquiring intercultural communicative competence is expected to result in “intercultural speakers” of that language. If the process is combined with citizenship education, this enriches language education with “meaningful content” and leads to “education for intercultural citizenship in the foreign language classroom”. Byram, Golubeva, Han and Wagner (2017) [13] suggest that such integration of the above takes place when transnational and critical perspectives of foreign language education are combined with civic action in the community.

Foreign language education, intercultural communicative competence and intercultural citizenship - a Bulgarian perspective

Since it appeared, the CEFR has naturally led to an alignment of language teaching and assessment across the different EU countries. In Bulgaria, for example, this tendency was evident even before our country joined the EU – in 2000, State Educational Requirements for all foreign languages taught in the system of Bulgarian secondary education were adopted. They include a clear statement that the aim of foreign language teaching in the country is “to prepare students to communicate with people belonging to other cultural and linguistic communities in situations that go beyond the boundaries of the native language environment; to teach them to seek, discover and understand information from sources in a foreign language; to enhance their language culture; to develop skills for further autonomous learning and improving their foreign language skills” (State Educational Requirements (for foreign languages), 2000). [14] The newly adopted Preschool and School Education Act (2016) [15] is accompanied by new Standards. Thus the State Educational Standard for General Education includes the requirements for foreign language teaching directly referring to the CEFR. These requirements are described by level of education as well as level of language proficiency “from A1 to B2.1 according to the CEFR (Ordinance No 5 of 30 November 2015 for General Education). [16] The aims of foreign language education within the system of Bulgarian secondary education are thus specified as follows:

- enhancing students’ language, general culture and communication culture;
- encouraging pupils to understand their national identity in terms of linguistic and cultural diversity;

- developing students' intercultural competences and preparing them for communication with other cultural and linguistic communities;
- developing skills for autonomous development through: initiative-taking, creativity, problem solving, independent-decision making, critical thinking, etc.;
- developing students' skills in team work;
- teaching students to use information from foreign language sources;
- using the foreign language as a means of acquiring knowledge in different general subjects;
- developing learning skills related to understanding information and applying it in new situations, performing analysis, synthesis and evaluation;
- creating the conditions for building language competences in the relevant language, including knowledge, skills and strategies for successful communication.

What is more, all foreign language syllabi for all grades and levels of education, which are derived from the above requirements, explicitly state the need to enrich foreign language lessons with civic education content.

Along with the European Language Portfolio, in 2008, another portfolio was made available – the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters. However, empirical research done by Bulgarian teachers of English prove that the very existence and wide availability of such documents is not enough. In their view, pupils need targeted and sustained support in this area, starting in their foreign language learning at school (Tsvetkova, 2012). [17]

The potential of Bulgarian foreign language education to foster European citizenship

In a survey of Bulgarian foreign language teachers' attitudes to including European citizenship topics into their classroom practice, the teachers pointed out several important factors which can facilitate this process. Put in the order of priority the teachers attributed to them, these are:

- systematic and purposeful implementation of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), not only at the so-called “language schools” with intensive teaching of a foreign language in the 8th grade, which are most commonly associated with this approach, at all schools and all stages of secondary education;

- systematic and purposeful use of ICT in classroom activities and communication, in line with the current trends in e-learning and electronically mediated communication;
- internalising the results of schools', teachers' and students' involvement in European projects in order to implement good pedagogical practices resulting from the exchange of ideas and concrete solutions between partners within the EU with a view to enriching the methodological approaches applied in foreign language classes in Bulgaria and other European countries;
- creating conditions in class and extra-curricular activities for authentic communication in the foreign language being studied, leading to increased motivation to learn and to enhance foreign language skills and intercultural communication skills (Tsvetkova, 2016). [18]

The analysis of the current State Educational Requirements (SER) for languages and the syllabi stemming out from them proves that while there is little direct reference to Europe and the EU, it is possible to look for support towards implementing EU topics in language education on the basis of the prescribed activities leading to developing ICC, acquiring social and civic competences and encouraging creativity. In line with the CEFR, teaching the Bulgarian language is seen as inseparable from teaching the first and the second foreign language in the SER and this is emphasised in all respective syllabi too, which gives ground to expect that activities aiming at critical analysis of texts (of different sources and genres), creating own texts and communicating about topics such as protection of human rights, valuing diversity and multiperspectivity among others while actively drawing on other subjects such as History, Literature, Geography, etc., will allow students to develop their skills as European citizens. Furthermore, taking part in projects under EU programs such as Erasmus+ or using the affordances of the eTwinning platform (Borisova, 2017, Borisova, 2018) [19] are especially beneficial in this respect.

Looking forward – by way of conclusion

At the tertiary level, however, further research is needed to establish the role of language learning especially in view of the processes in the European Higher Education Area which imply intensified exchange not only among EU universities but also with universities from other parts of the world. An empirical study of the practical implications of language policy at Sofia University was carried out in 2010 – 2011 (Stoicheva, 2011) [20] and it helped understand the language repertoires of

university students and formulate some recommendations for a more structured approach to teaching languages and assessing language proficiency at the tertiary. Two years later, a similar survey was undertaken to establish the connection between language education in the secondary and in the tertiary (Chavdarvova et al., 2013). [21] It established that school leavers have a positive attitude to continuing enhancing their language skills in both Bulgarian and the foreign languages they had studied at school. In summary, all the above lead to the conclusion that there are both conditions and a need for an educational continuum to guarantee ensuring the continuity and interdependence of learning L1 and L2, L3, etc., at all levels of education. Nevertheless, what the results of involving university students in European projects are, or how their spending a semester abroad using the opportunities of the Erasmus programme influences them as language learners, intercultural speakers and active EU citizens, are topics which deserve researchers' attention.

Acknowledgements

*The paper is the result of the author's work on a small-scale research project funded by Sofia University – "The EU starts at school".

References and Notes:

[1] Byram, M., Gribkova, B. & Starkey, H. (2002). *Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching – a practical introduction for teachers*. Language Policy Division Council of Europe, Strasbourg, p. 5.

[2] Damen, L. (1987). *Culture learning: The fifth dimension in the language classroom*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Kramsch, C. (1993) *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Seelye, H. N. (1992, 1998). *Teaching culture: Strategies for intercultural communication*. Lincoln-wood (Illinois): N.T.C.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon UK: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., & Risager, K. (1999). *Language teachers, politics and cultures*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Roberts, C.; Byram, M. Barro, A.; Jordan, S. & Street, B. (2000). *Language Learners as Ethnographers*. Clevedon UK: Multilingual matters.

- [3] Byram, M. (2001). Language teaching as a political action. In M. Bax, & J. Zwart (Eds.), *Reflections on language and language learning*. In honour of Arthur van Essen (pp. 91–104) Amsterdam / Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship*.
- Porto, M. (2014). Intercultural citizenship education in an EFL on-line project in Argentina. In: *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 14, pp. 245–261.
- [4] *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. (2001). Cambridge (England): Cambridge University Press.
- [5] Stoicheva, M. (2006). *European Language Policy*. Sofia: University Publishing House “St. Kliment Ohridski”. (In Bulgarian)
- [6] *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. (2001). Cambridge (England): Cambridge University Press, p. 43.
- [7] Tsvetkova, N. (2013). How Intercultural Am I or the European Language Portfolio as a Tool in Intercultural Education. In: *Language Identity and Culture in language education*. ICC the international language association. British Council/Macmillan.
- [8] Castle Sinicrope, J. N., Norris, J. & Watanabe, Y. (2007). Understanding and assessing intercultural competence: A summary of theory, research, and practice. *Second Language Studies*, 26 (1), pp. 1-58.
- [9] Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon UK: Multilingual Matters.
- [10] Zarate, G. (2003). Identities and plurilingualism: preconditions for the recognition of intercultural competences. In: Byram, M. (2003). (Ed.) *Intercultural competence*. Language Policy Division, DG IV – Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education. Council of Europe. Strasbourg.
- [11] Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship*.
- [12] Byram, M. (2001). Language teaching as a political action. In M. Bax, & J. Zwart (Eds.), *Reflections on language and language learning*. In honour of Arthur van Essen (pp. 91–104) Amsterdam / Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Starkey, H. (2002). Democratic citizenship, languages, diversity and human rights. *Guide for the development of Language Education Policies in Europe. From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual*

Education. Language Policy Division, Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education. DGIV. Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

[13] Byram, M., Golubeva, I., Hui, H., & Wagner, M. (2017). *From principles to practice in education for intercultural citizenship*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

[14] (State Educational Requirements (for Foreign Languages), 2000. In: Ordinance No 2 of 18 May 2000 for Educational Content. <https://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136697599>. Retrieved on 15.01.2018. (In Bulgarian).

[15] Preschool and School Education Act (2016)

[16] Ordinance No 5 of 30 November 2015 for General Education. In: Ordinance No 2 of 30 November 2015 for General Education. <https://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136697599>. Retrieved on 15.01.2018. (In Bulgarian).

[17] Tsvetkova, N. (2012). English language learning at a secondary school level and interculturality. In: *Foreign Language Teaching*, 2012, vol. 3, pp. 236-246.

[18] Tsvetkova, N. (2016). Language teachers and European dimension of modern language teaching. In: *Bulgarian journal of education*. Volume 2, 2016, pp. 59-76.

[19] Borisova, T. (2017). EU Language policies – multilingualism and multiculturalism and their place in foreign language teaching at Bulgarian secondary schools. In: *i-spisanie*. Volume 12/2017. <https://diuu.bg/emag/6985/>. Retrieved on 15.01.2018. (In Bulgarian).

Borisova, T. (2018). Introducing European Integration topics in Secondary ELT. . In: Carson, L., Kwok, C.K., & Smyth, C. (2018). *Identities in urban contexts: The European multilingual city*. Trinity College, Dublin: CLCS Occasional Papers. (Pending publication).

[20] Stoicheva, M. (Ed.) (2011). *Bulgaria - Europe: Language Policies*. Sofia: University Publishing House “St. Kliment Ohridski”. (In Bulgarian)

[21] Chavdarova, A., Penkova, R. & Tsvetkova, N. (2013). “School Leavers’ Attitudes to, Evaluation of and Perspectives on Language Learning”. *Foreign Language Teaching*. 40/1, 2013, 27-38. (In Bulgarian).

Bibliography:

Borisova, T. (2017). EU Language policies – multilingualism and multiculturalism and their place in foreign language teaching at Bulgarian secondary schools. In: *i-spisanie*. Volume 12/2017. <https://diuu.bg/emag/6985/>. Retrieved on 15.01.2018. (In Bulgarian).

Borisova, T. (2018). Introducing European Integration topics in Secondary ELT. . In: Carson, L., Kwok, C.K., & Smyth, C. (2018). *Identities in urban contexts: The European multilingual city*. Trinity College, Dublin: CLCS Occasional Papers. (Pending publication).
Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon UK: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (2001). Language teaching as a political action. In M. Bax, & J. Zwart (Eds.), *Reflections on language and language learning*. In honour of Arthur van Essen (pp. 91–104) Amsterdam / Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.

Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship*.

Byram, M. Gribkova, B. & Starkey, H. (2002). *Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching – a practical introduction for teachers*. Language Policy Division Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

Byram, M., & Risager, K. (1999). *Language teachers, politics and cultures*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., Golubeva, I., Hui, H., & Wagner, M. (2017). *From principles to practice in education for intercultural citizenship*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Castle Sinicrope, J. N., Norris, J. & Watanabe, Y. (2007). Understanding and assessing intercultural competence: A summary of theory, research, and practice. *Second Language Studies*, 26 (1), 1-58.

Chavdarova, A., Penkova, R. & Tsvetkova, N. (2013). “School Leavers’ Attitudes to, Evaluation of and Perspectives on Language Learning”. *Foreign Language Teaching*. 40/1, 2013, 27-38. (In Bulgarian).

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. (2001). Cambridge (England): Cambridge University Press.

Damen, L. (1987). *Culture learning: The fifth dimension in the language classroom*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Kramsch, C. (1993) *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ordinance No 5 of 30 November 2015 for General Education. <https://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136697599>. Retrieved on 15.01.2018. (In Bulgarian).

Porto, M. (2014). Intercultural citizenship education in an EFL on-line project in Argentina. In: *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 14, 245–261.

Preschool and School Education Act (2016). <https://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136641509> Retrieved on 15.01.2018. (In Bulgarian).

Roberts, C.; Byram, M. Barro, A.; Jordan, S. & Street, B. (2000). *Language Learners as Ethnographers*. Clevedon UK: Multilingual matters.

Seelye, H. N. (1992, 1998). *Teaching culture: Strategies for intercultural communication*. Lincoln-wood (Illinois): N.T.C.

Starkey, H. (2002). Democratic citizenship, languages, diversity and human rights. *Guide for the development of Language Education Policies in Europe. From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education*. Language Policy Division, Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education. DGIV. Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

State Educational Requirements (for foreign languages). In: *Ordinance № 2 on the educational content of* 18.05.2000. (In Bulgarian).

Stoicheva, M. (2006). *European Language Policy*. Sofia: University Publishing House “St. Kliment Ohridski”. (In Bulgarian)

Stoicheva, M. (Ed.) (2011). *Bulgaria - Europe: Language Policies*. Sofia: University Publishing House “St. Kliment Ohridski”. (In Bulgarian)

Tsvetkova, N. (2012). English language learning at a secondary school level and interculturality. In: *Foreign Language Teaching*, 2012, vol. 3, pp. 236-246.

Tsvetkova, N. (2013). How Intercultural Am I or the European Language Portfolio as a Tool in Intercultural Education. In: *Language Identity and Culture in language education. ICC the international language association*. British Council/Macmillan.

Tsvetkova, N. (2016). Language teachers and European dimension of modern language teaching. In: *Bulgarian journal of education*. Volume 2, 2016, pp. 59-76.

Zarate, G. (2003). Identities and plurilingualism: preconditions for the recognition of intercultural competences. In: Byram, M. (2003). (Ed.) *Intercultural competence*. Language Policy Division, DG IV – Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education. Council of Europe. Strasbourg.

**Сп. „Реторика и комуникации“, брой 34, май 2018 г., <http://rhetoric.bg/>
**Rhetoric and Communications E-journal, Issue 34, May 2018, <http://journal.rhetoric.bg/>
Special Issue – “Dialogues without borders: strategies of interpersonal and inter-group communication”, 29 – 30 September 2017, Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia, Bulgaria****