# SOME ASPECTS OF CULTURE TEACHING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND ESP CLASSES: CULTURAL SCRIPTS AND SMALL TALK

**Ivona Baranovskaja[1], Pavel Skorupa[2]**

Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Saulėtekio al. 11, LT-10223 Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mails: [1]ivona.baranovskaja@vgtu.lt; [2]pavel.skorupa@vgtu.lt

The present paper deals with the problem of teaching culture in the foreign language classes at all levels of education. Cultural studies should not be separated from the language syllabus and foreign language learning should not be limited to formal learning of systems of sounds, words, and syntactic structures, but should also include learning the culture of the target language. Success in intercultural communication depends greatly on the understanding of a number of cultural features. The article emphasizes the importance of teaching and learning target culture, as well as introduces the analysis of cultural scripts and small talk in English, Russian and Polish languages. Understanding the cultural differences will benefit and facilitate cross-cultural communication under diverse circumstances. Thereby, this issue is relevant to foreign language and ESP classes focusing on the improvement of both students' language and cultural skills.

**Keywords:** culture, communication, cross-cultural communication, communicative competence, cultural scripts, small talk, foreign language learning, foreign language teaching.

## Introduction

**The Relevance of the Research.** In the modern era of travel and migration when cultures are in constant contact, successful cross-cultural communication is fundamental for all: nations, specific ethnic and social groups, and individuals. As Deborah Tannen puts it (cited in Wierzbicka 2006a: 20), "The fate of the Earth depends on cross-cultural communication." Millions of people change their living place for many reasons. Some of them are immigrants or refugees, others are students seeking for education or some employment, and there is a vast number of those just in search of new life. Undoubtedly, what all of them will face is adaptation to a new cultural environment. Newcomers will have to learn to communicate with people of the target culture; they will need to develop certain cross-cultural understanding to be able to cope with the new surroundings and not yet accustomed circumstances. Communication between people with different language backgrounds is always to a greater or lesser extent problematic and delicate.

Traditionally, language has been defined as a tool for communication. Obviously, people can transmit a message through other channels like body language, eye contact or some facial expression, but still language is primarily regarded as the core of communication. Learning and understanding a language encompasses not only knowledge of grammar, lexis and phonology, but also certain features and characteristics of

the culture. Language cannot and does not exist apart from culture. If language is taught without simultaneously teaching the culture in which it functions, meaningless symbols are taught or just symbols to which the learner attaches the wrong meaning (Politzer 1959 discussed in Brooks 1986: 123).

**The object of the research** is teaching culture of the target language in foreign language and/or ESP classes at the secondary and tertiary levels.

**The aim of the research** is to provide necessary information to the foreign language teachers and learners so that they can establish a good connection with the target language and its culture. In addition, the research seeks to find out how teaching culture of the target language can improve students' communicative competences, and highlight the importance of culture studies at all levels of education. Moreover, the paper aims at the comparison of Anglo, Russian and Polish cultures with reference to cultural scripts and the notion of small talk.

**The methods of the research** are the analytical-critical method and the comparative method. The analytical-critical method comprises an in-depth analysis of the international literature on the field and aims to provide the perspective on culture as a constituent part of foreign language teaching. The same approach was employed to review the significance of small talk in Anglo culture. The comparative method has been used to compare the cultural scripts, which are representative of English, Russian and Polish cultures.

## The concept of communicative competence

At the time of burgeoning globalization, the notion of "communication" in foreign language teaching appeared due to the continually changing needs and conditions of the 20th and 21st centuries. In the 1970s, the communicative approach to foreign language teaching, whose main goal was to develop learners' communicative compe-

tence, was introduced. In 1972, Dell Hymes (discussed in Hyde 1998; Usó-Juan, Martínez-Flor 2008), a sociolinguist and an anthropologist, was the first to assert that language and culture were inseparable. He viewed language as a medium to express culture of a particular cultural group. For Hymes it was vital to have the perception of "context" in order to use language appropriately and, thus, correctly (Hyde 1998).

Hyde expressed doubts about the older language teaching model where learning the vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation of a foreign language were thought to be enough to become proficient. However, as soon as a new communicative methodology was proposed, the foreign language learner had to know how to appropriately use both rules of grammar and rules of language in a given context (Usó-Juan, Martínez-Flor 2008). In a similar vein, many other linguists and scholars admitted that a good command of the vocabulary and grammar does not necessarily lead to good mastery of a language. According to Hyde, Kramsch, Thanasoulas *et al.*, language teaching should aim at the communicative competence which implicates cultural context of a target language.

Through the years, many researchers such as Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983), Bachman (1990) and Celce-Murcia (1995) *et al.* attempted to determine the specific components of the construct of the communicative competence (Usó-Juan, Martínez-Flor 2008).

The current paper adheres to the classifications of three scholars – Byram (1998) and Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2008) – and compares them. Byram (1998) distinguishes three components of the communicative competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse, whereas Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2008) single out two more abilities which are intercultural and strategic competences. The linguistic competence is referred to the ability to apply the rules of the language to produce and interpret a spoken or written text. The sociolinguistic competence, or pragmatic as suggested by Usó-Juan and Martínez-Flor (2008), is defined as the speaker's knowledge of how to express

appropriate messages within the social and cultural context of communication in which they are produced. The discourse competence is the ability to select and sequence utterances or sentences to produce a cohesive and coherent spoken or written text given a particular purpose and situational context. In addition, the strategic competence is defined as knowledge of both learning and communication strategy, and the intercultural competence concerns the knowledge of how to interpret and produce a spoken or written piece of discourse within a particular sociocultural context.

Worthy of note, however, is the fact that Byram (1998) does not differentiate the intercultural competence being a part of the communicative competence, and states that these two are distinct concepts. According to him, the notion of communicative competence is accurate when it is used to describe native speakers talking to each other. This type of the communication excludes people of different cultural origins who belong to different social groups.

R. Scollon and S. W. Scollon (1995) align themselves with Byram and maintain that this can have an effect on the course of interaction or lead to a communication failure without complete understanding of the reasons even when both interlocutors are quite competent in the language as such. This suggests that when using a foreign language to communicate with someone of different cultural origins, the linguistic competence is necessary but not enough. Respectively, the intercultural competence, which is different and more intricate than that of the native speaker, is needed. The foreign language learner should not seek to become an artificial native speaker but an "intercultural speaker" in his own right (Kramsch 1997 cited in Byram 1998: 95).

A number of interrelated skills compound the competence of the proficient intercultural speaker. The aspects of the intercultural competence are the following: attitudes (curiosity and openness), knowledge (of social groups, their life and behaviour), skills of interpreting and relating (some document or event from another culture), skills of discovery and interaction (ability to acquire and operate new knowledge of a culture in real time communication), and critical cultural awareness (ability to critically evaluate) (Byram 1998: 96).

Overall, though these scholars view the communicative competence slightly in a different way, they share a similar approach and agree that language learners need the competence which is complex enough rather than it seems at first as learners cannot master a target language without adequate knowledge of the culture related to that language. As a result, there is the necessity to allot one part of classroom instruction to making knowledge about sociolinguistic rules that include understanding how to use language for certain purposes in different social contexts.

## The significance of culture teaching

Culture has been included into the curriculum of foreign languages as one of the major issues rather recently. Immediately, there is a question "Why?" What are the reasons of procrastination of incorporating the teaching of culture into the foreign language curriculum? It could be predicted that it was not an easy task to provide an answer to the question "What is culture, what do people mean by the idea of culture?", particularly in the increasingly international world. Obviously, culture is not easily seen, something non-material, intangible, something more difficult to observe. Following the definition provided by *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* (2002), culture is described as "the customs, beliefs, art, music, and all the other products of human thought made by a particular group of people at a particular time". Similarly, in the anthropological sense culture is defined as "the whole way of life of people or a group" (quoted in Thanasoulas 2001: 9). In this context, culture is seen as social practice that binds a group of people together and distinguishes them from others. Spradley (1980 discussed in Lee McKay 2002: 82) shares the anthoropologists' view on

culture and places special emphasis on the importance of the knowledge that people learn as members of a group. Further, according to Lado (1986: 53), culture is "structured systems of patterned behaviour" of a given group of people. It is a kind of learned behaviour shared by those members and which is perpetually passed down from generation to generation. It should be also noted that not only does this concept include what is learned, what patterns of behaviour are acquired, but also how to implement those actions in real time context. This implies that culture is learned, not innate.

Learners usually appreciate the importance of learning cultural aspects when they visit a foreign country and face the difficulties. Very often learners think they have a complete linguistic knowledge of a foreign language, but they fail to communicate appropriately with native speakers according to their sociocultural rules. They are more successful at being accurate than appropriate what may result in plenty of misunderstandings (Tomalin 2008; Scollon, R.; Scollon, S. W. 1995).

Consequently, an increasing number of foreign language teachers realize that learners cannot hope to be fully-competent without a good knowledge of the culture of the target language (Thanasoulas 2001; Brooks 1986). Likewise, learners rarely learn a language for purely academic purposes. They learn so they can communicate with others who speak the language. If teachers wish their learners to master another language, they need to help them become communicatively competent as much as possible. They should seek to enhance their students' awareness of the social and cultural features of the language they are learning, to inform and explain the differences between the two cultures and develop students' critical thinking.

It is essential in deciding what elements to include as aspects of culture in a foreign language programme. More specifically, learners need to become aware of the culturally appropriate ways of addressing people, expressing opinion, gratitude, agreeing or disagreeing with someone, making requests, appropriate topic of conversation, speech acts (e.g. apologies, suggestions, complaints, refusals, etc.), connotations, etiquette, i.e. appropriate or inappropriate behaviour, etc., as well as be provided with the opportunity to talk and act like authentic native speakers. For example, students can dramatize conversations using different varieties of language, appropriate gestures, expressions, and distances which imitate those of a native speaker. Moreover, learners should be aware of intonation patterns since what is appropriate in one speech community might be perceived differently by members of the target language speech community. In short, Valette briefly distinguishes four main categories of cultural goals for the classroom teacher: "to develop a greater awareness of and a broader knowledge about the target culture; acquire a command of the etiquette of the target culture; understand differences between the target culture and the students' culture; and understand the values of the target culture" (Valette 1986: 181).

Culture classes should be focused on having a humanizing and motivating effect on the language learner and the learning process. They should help learners observe similarities and differences among various cultural groups and, thus, develop tolerance (Genc, Bada 2005). Learners are expected to learn to appreciate that all people have culture and there are no "good" or "bad" cultures, no superior or inferior cultures; learners should develop an appreciation of "global understanding". As Finocchiaro (1989: 134) said: "We each need the cooperation and humanity of our fellows to remain human". What is needed is a real two-way communication between open-minded people.

With the change of the teaching models, i.e. from the grammatical to communicative, the language teacher was challenged to efficiently put the new teaching model into working practice. Omaggio (2001 cited in Usó-Juan, Martínez-Flor 2008: 162) indicates three main reasons for these difficulties. First, teachers usually have an overcrowded curriculum to cover, and teaching culture requires both a lot of time and work. Second, many teachers have a limited knowledge

of the target culture and, therefore, are afraid to teach it. Finally, teachers are often confused and puzzled what cultural aspects to teach. To continue, sometimes teachers are just hardly aware of the necessity of cultural orientation. They regard communication as the application of grammatical rules in oral and written practice. In spite of all the obstacles, Politzer (1959 discussed in Brooks 1986: 123) emphasizes that as language teachers they must be interested in the study of culture not because they just *want* to teach the culture of the other country but because they *have* to do it. Additionally, it should be stressed that the teacher's self-confidence and awareness in the field influences a successful flow and results achieved in the classroom. The teacher of today should reflect on such issues as what is taught, how it is taught, and why it is taught.

Many scholars (Thanasoulas 2001; Scollon, R.; Scollon S. W. 1995; Finocchiaro 1989) support the inclusion of culture in language teaching on the grounds that it is motivating. Teaching culture can also be highly productive as this area often generates high levels of interest and involvement in learners. However, despite being stimulating and constructive, it is important to note that learning about another culture should not definitely mean that a person must accept that culture.

Tomalin (2008) considers culture as the fifth language skill in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing. He interprets the fifth language skill as the medium of adapting one's knowledge to learn about, understand, and appreciate the values, ways of doing things, and unique qualities of other cultures. The comprehension of culture teaches to accept differences, to be flexible and tolerant to ways of doing things. As Tomalin (2008: 2) deduces, learning culture is "an attitudinal change that is expressed through the use of language."

The analysed literature on intercultural communication and the communicative competence mainly emphasizes the need to incorporate cultural aspects into teaching syllabus, but rarely spells out what specifically must be learned. Usually, there is lack of identification

of what Anglo cultural patterns the learners should be aware of. Therefore, in this paper an attempt has been made to introduce the learners and teachers to two cultural aspects of the English language, particularly Anglo cultural scripts and small talk.

## Anglo, Russian and Polish cultural scripts

Every language carries its own cultural baggage, which consists of various cultural norms, values and practices. The term "cultural scripts" refers to different aspects of thinking, speaking and behaving. Cultural scripts encompass the following linguistic instances: cultural key words, common sayings and proverbs, frequent collocations, conversational routines and varieties of formulaic or semi-formulaic speech, discourse particles and interjections, and terms of address and reference (Goddard, Wierzbicka 2004: 154). Cultural scripts are learned implicitly, through observation and participation, and not by deliberate study (Stigler, Hiebert 1999: 86). Within a culture, cultural scripts are widely shared but rarely seen. People do not normally contemplate on their existence, however, they notice if a certain feature is flouted.

In this part of the paper an emphasis is placed on the differences of some cultural aspects of the English, Russian and Polish languages. The choice depended on such facts as English being one of the most studied languages by young people and adults all over the world, and that the authors' native languages are Russian and Polish, as well as the need to better understand how the scripts differ in the aforementioned languages.

Firstly, Anglo culture is associated with the use of "compact phraseology", i.e. concise, accurate and brief way Englishmen express themselves (Wierzbicka 2006a). What a person wants to say with some words should convey exactly that meaning that the words bear, i.e. the words should mean no more and no less than what that person wants to express. That is why, many cul-

tural observers perceive English as the language of understatement (expressing less meaning than it really is through such possible linguistic means as downtoners, diminishers, minimizers, deintensifiers, compromisers, approximators).

One German commentator H. Bütow (Wierzbicka 2006a: 28) joked on Anglo culture saying that everything is in the style of understatements. Another Hungarian-British writer, as well as a social commentator and a satirist, George Mikes (Wierzbicka 2006a: 28) described "understatements" as a characteristic feature of English native speakers that makes them different from foreigners. In this manner, the English language is typically recognized by cultural outsiders as the language of understatement, non-exaggeration, and accuracy. All these features are linked with the scientific nature of modern Anglo culture: being rational, dispassionate, factually based, precise and accurate.

The above mentioned qualities make a model of "good speech". The speaker should be careful when choosing his words and phrasing what he wants to say; he must not allow his words to say more than what he is really prepared to say. This aspect once again emphasizes the cautious and guarded way of modern Anglo speaking.

Furthermore, every regular English learner has individually encountered a great number of such qualifying phrases as *in my opinion*, *to my mind*, *as I see it*, *it seems to me*, *from my point of view* and the like. These discourse markers serve as limitations of one's knowledge. This is so because these "knowledge" markers have their own history in Anglo culture.

The origins of this cultural aspect date back to John Locke, one of the greatest British philosophers of the 17th century. He was the one who attempted to distinguish between what one knows and what one thinks. He asserted that human knowledge is extremely limited and there is a need to clearly draw the line between "knowing" and "thinking". A person should seek to acknowledge the limitations of his knowledge and avoid saying "I know" when all he can say is "I think". He made the speaker evaluate himself whether he is always a reliable source of informa-

tion. As a result, Locke's ideas have influenced modern Anglo culture and made Anglo cultural scripts significant. This peculiarity is also related to the prestige of science and the cult of knowledge due to the advent of the Enlightenment and the scientific revolution (Wierzbicka 2006a).

The following expressions such as *I think / думаю, что / myślę że*, *in my opinion / по-моему / moim zdaniem*, and *it seems to me / мне кажется / mi się wydaje* are often used in the Russian and Polish languages to express considered judgements (Thomas 1983). However, it should be noted that Russian speakers tend to use these expressions for rather less weighty opinions. For example, "Мне кажетсяб, кто-то пришел" (It seems to me there's someone at the door) or "По-моему (мнению) фильм начинается в 8 часов" (In my opinion the film begins at 8), whereas in everyday English and Polish the expressions *it seems to me* and *in my opinion* would be omitted in this context (e.g. Polish equivalents "Ktoś przyszedł" (Somebody came), "Film zaczyna się o 8" (The film stars at 8)) (Thomas 1983).

Secondly, different cultures have different attitudes towards expressing emotions, either straightforwardly or implicitly, and these attitudes influence the way in which people speak. To put it differently, there are emotional/multi-active (Russian, Polish) and unemotional/linear-active cultures (English) (Ahida 2001).

The Anglo concern about control over one's words also means control over one's feelings. There is a relative absence of emotion in Anglo discourse. From an Anglo cultural perspective, emotions or "too much feeling" can be regarded as an obstacle to good and reasonable thinking. People should be calm and keep their cool or act without visible emotion when expressing their thoughts about something; it is good to conduct oneself in a calm and cool fashion. If a person is emotional, there is a great possibility to fail to rationally process information and to weaken or even damage sensible and intelligent action (Wierzbicka 2006a: 48).

By contrast, in Polish culture behaviour that shows feeling is seen as the norm, and directs interlocutors into more intimate camaraderie.

For an Englishman such easiness would seem excessive. There is self-analysis and self-control over one's emotions in Anglo culture, while Poles want others to know how they feel without any initial analysis of one's feelings. Polish cultural scripts encourage people to express their feelings and thoughts freely and to do this spontaneously; people express both good and bad feelings simultaneously without any delays and self-censorship (Wierzbicka 2007).

Similarly, a Russian cultural script is connected with the Russian key word "искрен-ность" (sincerity) and conveys the following: "it is good if a person wants other people to know what a person thinks", and "it is good if a person wants other people to know what a person feels" (Goddard, Wierzbicka 2007: 8). This script explains the Russian preference for speaking frankly regardless the fact that the thoughts and feelings may be negative or even socially unacceptable. Polish speakers are also bold in saying bad things about others and thus hurting their feelings. They can emphatically disagree with other people, reject their views as *wrong*, and engage themselves in heated arguments. Linguistic responses in such situations include various particles, interjections and response expressions, such as "Неправда!" – "To nie prawda! (Untruth! – It's not true!), "Ты не прав" – "Mylisz się" (You are wrong), "Да нет / ты что" – "Coś ty" (No – You what), as well as words expressing extreme moral evaluation, such as "подлец" – "podły", "негодяй" – "nikczemny", "мерзавец" – "łotr" (scoundrel, base person) (Goddard, Wierzbicka 2007: 9). Overall, each culture has its own way of handling one's feelings and different communication strategies to accomplish this, but it is obvious that Englishmen do not want others to feel bad, and in Russian and Polish cultures, it is not regarded as acceptable to lie to somebody under any circumstances. Nothing would be considered as offensive or hurtful as long as it is based on and compensated by "искренность" – "serdeczność" (sincerity).

Respectively, the notion of "distance" varies among cultures as well. In Anglo culture distance is perceived as a positive cultural value, related to one's respect for autonomy (Larina 2008). On the contrary, in Polish it is associated with hostility and alienation. The same could be said about Russian culture where distance is often understood as indifference.

One more Anglo cultural script is associated with the Anglo cultural key word "freedom", and is connected with "personal autonomy" which indicates that when a person does something, it is good if this person can think like this: "I am doing this because I want to do it" (Goddard, Wierzbicka 2007: 8). A great number of speech practices can be used for this script, mainly avoiding the use of direct imperative, and the performative use of the verb *ask* (cf. *I ask you…). A range of alternative suggestive strategies can be employed for this script, for instance: "Perhaps you could…", "I would suggest…", "Have you thought of…?", "How / What about…?", "If I were you, I would…", disclaimer formulas such as "It's up to you", "You don't have to", "Only if you want", and also frequently used interrogative directives (so-called "Wh-imperatives") "Could/Would you do…?" (Goddard, Wierzbicka 2007). These are highly conventionalized politeness forms in the English language usually interpreted by native speakers as a request to do something. This is in striking contrast to Russian and Polish cultures where it is perfectly acceptable to put emotional pressure on other people to do what one wants them to do (Wierzbicka 2006b).

In Anglo culture, the usage of imperatives or any other linguistic devices, which could suggest a direct order, or attempt to get somebody to do something is avoided. "To be English" one must avoid giving people the impression that one is "telling them to do something" (Wierzbicka 2006b). Some alternative way to express one's wishes should be chosen, for instance, "Could I have a piece of that chocolate cake, please?" The ideal solution is to phrase a wish as a suggestion which allows the addressee to proceed as if of their own accord (Wierzbicka 2006b).

By contrast, imperatives or "direct speech acts" are freely used by Russians and Poles to say to somebody to close the door, eg. "Закройте дверь" and "Zamknijcie drzwi", instead of say-

ing it in English manner "Could you close the door?" or "Would / Do you mind closing the door?". Also, it is possible in Russian and Polish to *ask* a person to do something: "Пожалуйста, сделайте это" and "Proszę cię, zrób to". The absence of a performative phrase of "asking" is a feature distinguishing modern English from such languages as Russian and Polish since it is incorrect to say in English "I ask you to do this" (Wierzbicka 2006b).

Further, the usual way to ask directions in Russian is simply to say "Tell me (please) how to get to…" (Скажите (пожалуйста), как добраться…) using direct imperative, while in English and Polish it is more elaborate: "Excuse me, please, could you tell me…" and "(Excuse me), can I ask the way to…" ((Przepraszam), czy mogę zapytać o drogę do...). The Russian way of communicating the same intention is perceived especially by English as brusque and discourteous. Russians are viewed as rude and impolite, they often sound assertive, argumentative or even aggressive. However, it is quite natural for Russian to ask simply "Where is the post office?" or to say "Give me one cigarette" which implies that the cigarete-rich person will always share them with the poor (Wierzbicka 2006b). In Russian communication, direct requests sound natural and quite polite: "Прочтите, пожалуйста" (Read, please) or "Напишите это упражнение, пожалуйста" (Write this exercise, please) (Larina 2008). These examples translated into English seem rude and disrespectful, but for Russian culture English formulas are too elaborate, ambiguous, ceremoniuos and over-polite. Imperative sentences are preferable in Russian communication, though indirect utterances are also possible, but they sound more formal and distant, and are considered to be more appropriate for a high register of communication (Larina 2008).

All in all, it is important to have a good understanding of cultural scripts for successful cross-cultural communication. People from diverse cultures can often experience a sense of strangeness or unfamiliarity since the ideas and attitudes are culturally strange. In everyday talk the impressions of Russians and Poles about Englishmen can be as "cold" (холодный – zimny) and "soulless" or "heartless" (бездушный – bez serca, nieczuły), whereas from an Anglo perspective, Russians and Poles are often seen as intense and heartfelt.

## Small talk

Small talk is an aspect of conversation that one may encounter with nearly in every culture, but not every culture is probably fond of making small talk to the extent that the representatives of Anglophone world do. In the greatest part of the English-speaking world, it is normal and even necessary to make small talk in various situations, especially when people meet for the first time and barely know each other (<http://www.englishclub.com/speaking/small-talk.htm>). To understand the importance of small talk it is necessary to understand its notion as well as its role in English culture.

*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (2000) and *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* (2002) define small talk as light and polite conversation on ordinary, unimportant or non-serious subject that occurs at a social occasion. Another definition of small talk presented at <http://en.wikipedia.org> describes this idiomatic expression as an "informal discourse not covering any functional topics of conversation or any transactions that need to be addressed" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_talk>). Although it might seem that small talk is something not very important and superficial, it serves two primary functions: it helps to avoid awkward pauses during the conversation and helps engage the other party in a deeper level of conversation as in many cultures silent moments between two people are mostly considered uncomfortable (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_talk>). The skill of small talk helps people to break the ice, makes people feel comfortable and helps them get to know each other. For instance, people in the Western culture are friendly to one another

and often talk to strangers on different occasions, which is unrepresentative of people in the Eastern culture. Thus, it is necessary to learners of English to master the important skill of small talk (<http://angliko.ru/lessons/talk/0070/>).

In her article Jill Bruellman (2008), a teacher of ESL/EFL and currently a Business English Communications Instructor for Sumikin-Intercom, Inc. in Kobe, Japan, argues that teaching the skill of small talk cannot and should not be abandoned from the curriculum at both secondary and tertiary level of education and ESP programmes, as it helps students develop their social competency. According to Bruellman, having mastered this social competency, students will become successful and active participants in the international world of business. Moreover, Bruellman argues that teaching small talk makes the classes student-centered, putting the student at the centre of learning and taking away the focus from the teacher as total controller of the learning process. According to Bruellman, learning the skill of small talk improves students' language and cultural skills. As Bruellman puts it: "They [students] will have awareness of small talk in English and their own culture. They will know the basic forms and rules. Teaching small talk should help their listening/active listening, speaking/fluency, question forms, eye contact, response time, and assertiveness" (<http://www.tht-japan.org/proceedings/2008/i-brullnam67-73.pdf>).

Students of English need good communication in different real life situations like interactions with teachers, conferences, social events, job interviews, etc. According to Evan Frendo (2006), a Business English teacher, teacher trainer and writer, students "need to be able to function effectively in the workplace, and to do this they need to be able to use the language to do various things within a specific context" (<http://associates.iatefl.org/pages/materials/ltskills2.pdf>). Frendo suggests that in order to adapt to various situations and roles, and to maintain the relationship with people, small talk is often used.

Moreover, Frendo states that "small talk is a fundamental part of Business English" and suspects that it is often neglected in the language classes for several reasons, one of which is a teacher's fear of not fulfilling their duties as an ESP teacher by offering the student's everyday chat. However, he presumes that the main reason for not teaching small talk in class is that: "<…> it is difficult to 'create' new relationships in the classroom – if small talk is about building relationships, then how do we go about ignoring the relationships which already exist in the classroom"? (<http://associates.iatefl.org/pages/materials/ltskills2.pdf>). Furthermore, Frendo suggests that teaching small talk is essential while teaching ESP in that "people do not only do business, they interact with each other as people as well" (<http://associates.iatefl.org/pages/materials/ltskills2.pdf>), and the role of the teacher is to make such interaction easy and effective.

According to Kenneth Beare (2011), the skill of small talk is highly valued among students of English, who are "more interested in making effective small talk than knowing correct grammar structures" (<http://esl.about.com/od/speakingenglish/a/smalltalk.htm>) for as it was mentioned before, small talk helps to break the ice in different social occasions and even gets friendships started. Nevertheless, Beare points out that making small talk is sometimes, if not often, difficult for both the learners of English and the native speakers due to the need of having a wide vocabulary to cover the wide range of topics.

Small talk topics can differ between cultures and it can be difficult to start a conversation with a stranger, especially if English is not one's mother tongue. The web site at <http://www.uk-studentlife.com> suggests a list of "safe" topics for a small talk with a stranger. The topics can be classified into the following categories: *introductions* (e.g. "Hello. May I introduce myself? My name is Mark."); *family* (e.g. "How is your family?" (but only if you already know about the person's family)); *weather / nature* (e.g. "It's a lovely day today, isn't it?" / "The garden looks lovely, doesn't it?"); *general news* (e.g. "What do you think about the recent floods?"); *work and education* (e.g. "How's your business going?" (but ask only if you know the person has

a business), "What are you studying?" (but ask only if you know the person is a student), "What sort of work do you do?")); *entertainment* (e.g. "Have you seen the film Bridget Jones's Diary?", "Did you see The X Factor last night?", "What sort of music do you like?"); *leisure activities* (e.g. "Did you have a good journey?", "Are you going anywhere this weekend?" or "Are you going anywhere on holiday this year?", "Have you read any good books recently?" (but only if you know the person likes reading), "Have you been watching Wimbledon?" (note that many British people, especially men, enjoy talking about football), "What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?"); *pets* (e.g. "What a lovely dog. What is his name?" (British people love dogs or cats)), etc. (<http://www.ukstudentlife.com/Personal/Manners.htm#SmallTalk>).

It should be noted that there is a number of topics that should be avoided especially when talking to a person one has just met, to elderly or older people, to people with strong religious or political views, and the like. These topics are age, appearance, and personal gossip about somebody known to both speakers, sexist or racist jokes, money, sex, previous or current relationships, politics, religion, criticisms or complaints (<http://www.ukstudentlife.com/Personal/Manners.htm#SmallTalk>).

When incorporating small talk into the language classes, the first thing Frendo (2006) proposes teachers could do is to read about small talk and discuss the problem of small talk and its importance with the learner so that the learner understands how it works. Next, the teacher should provide the student with recordings of authentic conversations to analyze the language in the conversation. Moreover, Frendo considers that it is important for the teacher to "ensure that learners use small talk in their role plays and simulations, and focus on it during feedback sessions" (<http://associates.iatefl.org/pages/materials/ltskills2.pdf>) and encourage natural small talk when it occurs in the class.

To facilitate the teaching of small talk, in her article Bruellman (2008) suggests breaking this skill down into three parts, i.e. beginning,

middle, and end and suggests some activities to teach and practice the beginning, the middle, and the end of small talk. To teach and practice the beginning of small talk, Bruellman suggests asking students to brainstorm questions and responses for small talk beginning, such as "Hey, how is it going?" – "Great, how about you?", etc. It should be pointed out that usually a native speaker's greeting is very quick and requires a quick and short answer. Students should be aware of different beginnings of a small talk, but it is not required to use all of them on different occasions. Before teaching the middle of the small talk, students' understanding of safe and avoidable topics should be checked. It should be noticed that there are no set phrases for the middles. It is often acceptable to talk about the weather, sports, job, etc. For instance, it is possible to start: "How is work going? – "Good. I just finished my report. How about you?" Usually it is not required to go into too much detail, but it is recommended to stay positive and to keep the conversation going by adding information (giving an answer in one sentence, not merely answering yes or no) and asking follow-up questions. And finally, to teach and practice the ends, the teacher should elicit from students the phrases they might know that are used to end conversations (e.g. "Well, it was nice talking to you." – "Thanks, you too. See you later." or "I've got to run." – "Me too. Have a good one!"). Students should be aware that the phrases for the ending of small talk can be mixed and it is possible to use many of them at one time. To practice the beginnings, middles and endings, Bruellman suggests using the audio-lingual method of choral repeat (<http://www.tht-japan.org/proceedings/2008/i-brullnam67-73.pdf>).

In his article, Stewart Jones (2004), an EFL teacher at Ritsumeikan University, proposes the AAA model of small talk to teach this skill in class. The model follows the formula: question – answer, add, ask. The proposed model requires the recipient of the question to answer it, add some information, and ask the interlocutor a question back. According to Jones, this model helps the speakers keep the conversation flowing

indefinitely without a need for a specific topic for the conversation or any specific purpose for interaction. Jones provides the following situation as an example of the AAA model:

*Situation: Two strangers left to talk to each other in a café after a mutual friend of theirs had to leave.*

*A: Do you live near here? (Question)*

*B: Yes, I do (Answer) ... in an apartment on 11th street (Add). Do you live nearby too (Ask)?*

*A: No (Answer) ... I'm just visiting the city (Add). Uh... have you lived here long? (Ask) B: Not so long (Answer). I moved here from Chicago three years ago (Add). What's the purpose of your visit?*

*(Ask) A: Oh, I ...*

(<http://www.eltnews.com/features/special/2004/04/whats_small_about_small_talk.html>)

The selection of a topic for a small talk conversation primarily depends on the circumstances of the conversation and often depends on the relationship between the participants. One should remember that the topic is usually less important than its social function. To reiterate, small talk is a speech function that helps to develop students' language and cultural skills and should not be abandoned from language classes at all levels of education.

## Conclusions

The attempt to focus on the relationship between language and culture has been made in this paper to see why the teaching of culture should constitute an integral part of a foreign language curriculum. The in-depth analysis of the literature was aimed at contributing to a better understanding of culture and its importance in the foreign language classroom. The following could be concluded:

1. Language learning/ teaching is aimed at the development of students' communicative competence and should not be limited only to knowledge and understanding of grammatical, lexical and phonological features of the target foreign language, but should also involve learning/ teaching the culture of that language, as according to some scholars (Politzer, Brooks *et al.*) language and culture are identical notions.

2. A person does not need to be a linguist to learn how and when to apply cultural aspects. Teachers should not only generally present and describe to their learners how cross-cultural communication occurs, but also provide practical tools, such as role-plays or simulations, that could be implemented in cross-cultural education.

3. Effective cross-cultural and interpersonal communication is impossible without sufficient understanding of cultural scripts. Appropriate training is necessary where the meaning and the purpose of learning cultural scripts would be explained together with certain potential problems which users should be aware of and prepared for.

4. The analysis of Anglo, Russian and Polish scripts indicates that in Russian and Polish cultures people behave in a more direct way, being less formal and less alerted. Russians and Poles seek genuine closeness, and place a great value on truth and sincerity in relations with others. In the meantime, in Anglo culture people value their privacy and follow the norms to protect their right of autonomy.

5. Small talk cannot be abandoned from the curriculum at both secondary and tertiary level of education, and ESP programmes as this skill improves students' language and cultural skills. The best way to teach small talk is the application of the AAA model proposed by Jones (2004).

6. The development of people's cultural awareness leads them to better critical thinking about, sensitivity to, and tolerance for both their own culture and the culture of the others. Teachers should help learners develop as much confidence as possible to live and communicate appropriately in their society, and also to communicate with people from other societies.

# References

Ahida, S. 2001. *Three Studies of Culture and Emotion* [online], [accessed on 30 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://www.music-cog.ohio-state.edu/Music829D/Notes/Culture.html>.

Beare, K. 2011. *Making Small Talk*. About.com Guide [online], [accessed on 8 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://esl.about.com/od/speakingenglish/a/smalltalk.htm>.

Brooks, N. 1986. Culture in the Classroom, in J. M. Valdes (Ed.). *Culture Bound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bruellman, J. 2008. *Shall We Small Talk?* [online], [accessed on 5 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://www.tht-japan.org/proceedings/2008/i-brullnam67-73.pdf>.

Byram, M. 1998. Intercultural Communicative Competence – the Challenge for Language Teacher Training, in Cherrington, R.; Davcheva, L. (Eds.). *Teaching Towards Intercultural Competence*. Bulgaria: The British Council.

Finocchiaro, M. 1989. *English as a Second/Foreign Language*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Frendo, E. 2006. *Teaching Small Talk in a Business English Class*. ELTAF Newsletter September 2006 [online], [accessed on 5 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://associates.iatefl.org/pages/materials/ltskills2.pdf>.

Genc, B.; Bada, E. 2005. Culture in Language Learning and Teaching, in Singhal, M. (Ed.). *The Reading Matrix* 5(1).

Goddard, C.; Wierzbicka, A. 2004. Cultural Scripts: What are They and What are They Good for?, *Intercultural Pragmatics* 1–2(2004): 153–166 [online], [accessed on 30 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://nats-www.informatik.uni-hamburg.de/pub/User/InterculturalCommunication/cultureWierz.pdf>.

Goddard, C.; Wierzbicka, A. 2007. Semantic Primes and Cultural Scripts in Language Learning and Intercultural Communication, in Palmer, G.; Sharifian, F. (Eds.). *Applied Cultural Linguistics*: Implications for second language learning and intercultural communication. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 105–124 [online], [accessed on 30 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://www.une.edu.au/bcss/linguistics/nsm/pdfs/GoddardWierzbicka.applied.NSM.pdf>.

*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. 6th edition. 2000. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hyde, M. 1998. A Look at Culture in Relation to Various Models of English Language Teaching, in Cherrington, R.; Davcheva, L. (Eds.). *Teaching Towards Intercultural Competence*. Bulgaria: The British Council.

Jones, S. 2004. *What's Small about Small Talk?* [online], [accessed 1 October, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://www.eltnews.com/features/special/2004/04/whats_small_about_small_talk.html>.

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

Lado, R. 1986. How to Compare Two Cultures, in Valdes, J. M. (Ed.). *Culture Bound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Larina, T. 2008. *Directness, Imposition and Politeness in English and Russian*. Cambridge ESOL: Research Notes: Issue 33(August 2008): 33–38. [online], [accessed on 30 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://www.cambridgeesol.org/rs_notes/rs_nts33.pdf>.

Lee McKay, S. 2002. *Teaching English as an International Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*. 5th edition. 2002. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Scollon, R.; Scollon, S. W. 1995. *Intercultural Communication*. Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

*Small Talk* [online], [accessed on 2 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://angliko.ru/lessons/talk/0070/>.

*Small Talk* [online], [accessed on 2 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_talk>.

*Small Talk* [online], [accessed on 2 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://www.englishclub.com/speaking/small-talk.htm>.

*Small Talk* [online], [accessed on 8 September, 2011]. Available from Internet : <http://www.ukstudentlife.com/Personal/Manners.htm#SmallTalk>.

Stigler, J. W.; Hiebert, J. 1999. *The Teaching Gap: Best Ideas from the World's Teachers for Improving Education in the Classroom*. New York: Free Press [online], [accessed on 30 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://51a24ab04446c2d294f27a5616b7459a3e0b18d1.gripelements.com/Documents/BMTL/Research_Base/Teaching_is_a_Cultural_Activity.pdf>.

Thanasoulas, D. 2001. *The Importance of Teaching Culture in the Foreign Language Classroom* [online], [accessed on 24 July, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue3_3/7-thanasoulas.html>.

Thomas, J. 1983. Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure, *Oxford Journals, Applied Linguistics* 4(2): 91–112 [online], [accessed on 30 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://applij.oxfordjournals.org/content/4/2/91.extract>.

Tomalin, B. 2008. *Culture – the Fifth Language Skill* [online], [accessed on 2 August, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/culture-fifth-language-skill>.

Usó-Juan, E.; Martínez-Flor, A. 2008. *Teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence through the Four Skills* [online], [accessed on 24 July, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://rua. ua.es/dspace/Bitstream/10045/10400/1/RAEI_09.pdf>.

Valette, R. M. 1986. The Culture Test, in Valdes, J. M. (Ed.). *Culture Bound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wierzbicka, A. 2006a. *English: Meaning and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wierzbicka, A. 2006b. Anglo Scripts against 'Putting Pressure' on Other People and their Linguistic Manifestations, in Goddard, C. (Ed.). *Ethnopragmatics. Understanding Discourse in Cultural Context*. Berlin, New York. doi:10.1515/9783110911114.31

Wierzbicka, A. 2007. Two languages, two cultures, one (?) self: Between Polish and English, in Besemers, M.; Wierzbicka, A. (Eds.). *Translating Lives : Living with Two Languages and Cultures*. Australia : UQP [online], [accessed on 30 September, 2011]. Available from Internet: <http://books.google.com/books/about/Translating_lives.html?id=k6Cs5JUIMl0C>.

# KAI KURIE KULTŪROS MOKYMO UŽSIENIO KALBOS PASKAITOSE ASPEKTAI: KULTŪRINĖS YPATYBĖS IR LENGVAS POKALBIS

**Ivona Baranovskaja, Pavel Skorupa**

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama kultūros mokymo per užsienio kalbos paskaitas problema visuose mokymosi lygiuose. Kultūros studijos neturi būti atskira užsienio kalbos mokymo(si) programos dalis, o užsienio kalbų mokymas neturi būti apribojamas formaliu garsų sistemų, žodžių ir sintaksinių struktūrų mokymu, taip pat turi mokyti studijuojamos kalbos kultūros. Tarpkultūrinio bendravimo sėkmė priklauso nuo daugybės kultūrinių ypatumų supratimo. Straipsnyje pabrėžiama studijuojamos kultūros mokymo(si) svarba, taip pat pateikiama anglų, rusų ir lenkų kalbų kultūrinių ypatybių ir lengvo pokalbio analizė. Kultūrinių skirtumų suvokimas pagerins ir palengvins tarpkultūrinį bendravimą esant įvairioms aplinkybėms. Todėl problema aktuali užsienio kalbos paskaitose, kurių tikslas – tobulinti kalbinius ir kultūrinius studentų įgūdžius.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** kultūra, komunikacija, tarpkultūrinė komunikacija, komunikacinė kompetencija, kultūrinės ypatybės, lengvas pokalbis, užsienio kalbos mokymas(is).