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Review of the doctoral dissertation

by MA Lulu Hao, entitled *A study on the Intercultural competence of English Majors in Chinese Universities*, prepared under the supervision of dr hab. Dorota Misiejuk, prof. UwB.

The reviewed work tackles a socially relevant and methodologically interesting topic. MA Lulu Hao set herself the goal of studying and assessing the intercultural competences of English-speaking students in Chinese universities and teachers in language colleges, as well as identifying factors that may limit or do limit the development of those competences. The choice of the study group and the research problem is of great practical significance - the peculiarities of Chinese culture and educational traditions may hinder students and graduates from efficiently navigating in an area other than their own culture, while globalization and the related changing aspirations of young people, lead them to perceive the need to participate more fully in the experience of speaking foreign languages (in this case, English) and to make use of achievements other than Chinese culture.

The survey was embedded in a quantitative research model, which seems to be an absolutely correct procedure due to the survey's diagnostic nature.

The undoubted value of the project is the potential for awakening reflection as a result of participation in the research -the respondents have the opportunity to assess their own intercultural competences, to see the broader context in which the process of learning a foreign language is embedded more fully. According to the Author of the dissertation, the tradition of teaching English in China is dominated by strictly acquiring linguistic skills, while the value and necessity of learning about the culture, of which the language is an integral element, still needs to be realized.

In analyzing the dissertation of MA Lulu Hao, I will first refer to the the structure of the content and the theoretical basis of the research, then I will focus on the methodological assumptions methodological assumptions and the presentation of the results of the Doctoral Student's research, in order to proceed to the final conclusion.

Structure of the dissertation, the theoretical basis of the research.

The work submitted for the review has the character of a synthetic, 216-page study of empirical nature. It consists of six chapters devoted, respectively, to introducing the reader to the problem, analyzing the literature, laying out the Author's concept, presenting the methodological assumptions of the Author's research, presenting conclusions. The work is enriched by a bibliography list and appendices containing the used research tools.

I perceive the layout of the work as logical, substantively justified. The division of the work into a theoretical part, a methodological part and a part on the analysis of the results of research, which is characteristic of social research, has been preserved. The introductory chapter is written in an interesting way and definitely allows the reader to understand the broader context of the work. In this chapter, the Author explains, among other things, the historical background of current attitudes toward interculturalism in China, points out the importance of intercultural competence during foreign language learning, describes the main research problems, questions, assumptions of the study.

The second chapter, which is a review of the literature on the subject, consists of five subsections divided, except for the last one, into even more detailed subsections. The author begins, correctly, with a definition of intercultural competence and clarifies closely related terms. This part of the work is structured correctly, although it is perhaps a pity that the content was not deepened, basically stopping at quoting definitions.

Next, some selected concepts of intercultural competence are described. This chapter is very interesting, it presents for example the concept of Hofsted, Bennett, Bochner, Byram, Kim, Chen, Ota, Yum very clearly and in an orderly manner. I find it accurate to first refer to well-known concepts of primarily Western authors, and then to present concepts originating from a cultural background closer to China. To some extent, this procedure already allows one to understand the somewhat different theoretical background of the various concepts. On pages 76-7 the Author put a table listing the concepts. What was perhaps missing was an attempt to identify the criteria for comparing the concepts, a summary of their most important assumptions has been made, but without an attempt to compare, to relate them to each other. Such a procedure, conducted either in

the table or in the body of the text, would have been an important contribution by the Author, would have shown the work of her own mind, would have gone beyond a simple account of the content. My remark only expresses a certain deficiency regarding the deepening of the content in this chapter, while I appreciate the Author's diligence, her thoroughness, her orderliness.

In the next chapter the Author lays out the key concepts underlying her research plan. It presents the interrelation between language, culture and communication. In my opinion, Ms. Hoa captures the essence of these concepts, presents the process of meaning construction in the course of language acquisition and use, and shows that language is a product of culture and at the same time it creates culture. Developing the content of the dissertation, one could, for example, look for references to Vygotsky's or Siegel's concepts. In the latter, the development of the mind is framed in the context of communicative functions, crucial to the development of man as a social being. This suggestion is not intended to point out the not presented theories-as it is the Author's right to choose them in the course of outlining the theoretical basis of the research. Rather, it is the basis for a reflection on the way Ms. Hoa presents the content- she perhaps consciously aims to synthesize the content in her dissertation and does not indicate the numerous possible connections to the theoretical "background", which is most evident in the second and third chapters and in principle does not affect the clarity of the argument. Therefore, I can conclude that this way of constructing the material is in this case an accurate and certainly acceptable choice.

In the reviewed chapter, the author also describes, in an interesting way, the development of education in China, the changes in the approach to language teaching, she also shows the importance of Confucianism as a way of understanding reality, which obviously affects what kind of students the Chinese are, how they understand the meaning of learning foreign languages, how they understand their participation in the culture of the nation whose language they are learning.

I consider this content to be accurately selected and allowing to understand the intention of the research.

In conclusion, the theoretical part of the work is logically constructed, the selection of content is justified, perhaps some passages could contain more in-depth references to the literature on the subject, nevertheless, I evaluate this part positively.

The methodological basis of the study and the results

The fourth chapter is devoted to the presentation of the methodological basis of the Author's research. The Doctoral Student begins with a brief presentation of the motivation for undertaking the project, then constructs the research questions. After formulating a general question (e.g., about the level of intercultural competence among Chinese students learning English), the author specifies it in a correct and systematic way, justifying convincingly these specific questions as well. She uses

the same procedure when developing the question about hindrances to students' acquisition of cultural competence. In the title of the chapter, the author also announces the hypotheses, but she does not formulate them in the traditional way - she could have explained that due to the diagnostic-descriptive nature of the research she deviates from constructing them.

The Doctoral Student translates the above-mentioned questions into a research plan, presents a list of indicators, and their description is a strong point of the chapter. The selection of the respondents is also well explained, and it is pointed out how the research tools correspond to the posed questions. The research procedure and schedule are described thoroughly.

This section lacked information on the relevance and reliability of the tools used; this would need to be supplemented when preparing the paper for publication. The subsection in which the author points out the limitations of the study would also need to be expanded; currently, this section is rather laconic and is practically limited to noting the size of the study group.

The next chapter is devoted to the analysis of the results of the Author's research. As expected, it can be considered the most interesting part of the text.

The chapter begins with a brief description of the respondent group, referring to the demographic data, tabulated. Next, the characteristics of the students in terms of the primary variable, that is, intercultural competence, are presented; the different profiles of the respondents are distinguished, and I find this procedure accurate and interesting. The results are then presented according to the order of the specific research questions, beginning with the importance of English language skills in understanding other cultures. The paper uses the term "affect," but examining the affect of particular variables on others would require controlling for other variables-possible in a research experiment. However, I assume that it was just a linguistic inconsistency.

The following questions, concerning the level of cultural sensitivity of the surveyed students, the characteristics of their relations with representatives of another culture, an assessment of how they find themselves in these relations, how they assess their own knowledge of the other culture, their readiness to participate in the culture, to go beyond the limits of their own comfort related to it - are of a diagnostic-descriptive nature and are correctly, from the point of view of this type of research, formulated, and the answers to them are quoted in a clear, correct way.

The results of the research are very interesting, for example, they allow to infer how values appreciated in the Chinese culture turn out to be significant for participating in other cultures - how politeness, restraint, refraining from seeking controversial themes, can put students in the position of being somewhat on the side of a multicultural reality. Other parts of the research are also thought-provoking and may prove very useful from the perspective of educational practice. For example, a conclusion can be made about the need to foster international friendships and to arrange

experiences of contact with foreign peers at the school or even kindergarten level.

The results on teachers' intercultural competence indicate that they are mostly aware of its importance, including the context of planning the students' future. The results on the use of IC shaping methods in the course of language teaching are interestingly presented. The description of the teacher's perspective on understanding IC is not only correct, but also encouraging reflection.

The Author also analyzes, among other things, the teacher education standards and subject syllabuses.

She presented the obtained information in summary tables (pp. 165/6) on the general and specific components of IC. She then made an important and interesting reflection on the causes of teachers' difficulties and then- difficulties as such concerning the development of intercultural competence- of teachers and students. I find this passage (beginning on page 167) particularly valuable, because the Author goes beyond presenting the results by commenting on them. It would be good to put this attempt to interpret the results in the literature's context.

On p. 172. the actual discussion of the results begins. In the first subsection, the Author presents the correlation between the different variables, then presents the profiles of intercultural competence, and later- she presents the assumptions of intercultural education, referring to the literature. As I understand it, MA Hao sees this perspective as an alternative to traditional teaching, as a way to develop IC. Such a need has been confirmed by her research.

In summary, the results chapter contains very interesting data, presented in an attractive way. An in-depth discussion of the results, their interpretation in relation to the literature has not been added. However, probably influenced by the content of the dissertation, I wonder if this is not due to a restraint rooted in the Chinese culture - the results are presented, but the interpretation could point someone in the direction of thinking about them, and the author may not necessarily find this desirable. I believe that this part of the paper definitely enriches the state of knowledge about intercultural competence in the studied population, and I evaluate it positively.

Conclusions and ending

In the sixth chapter, the Doctoral Student summarizes the project: she justifies her research interests, gives important biographical motives that have led her to choose the topic and have built the motivation to delve into the problem area related to intercultural competence. The possibility of practical application of the project is also outlined in this section. The theoretical topics are summarized, and here they are referred to the literature on the subject. The author indicates the

inspirations for research methods and describes the construction of the project's own research tools. I consider these tools to be a strong point of the project. The results are briefly summarized, and a high degree of correspondence between expected and obtained results is indicated. The author also outlines a picture of future research.

I find this chapter really valuable, organizing the knowledge, allowing to know more about the Author's idea, its roots and possible results.

The work ends with an index of one hundred and forty literature items and appendices containing the research tools.

Final conclusion

Summarizing the analysis of the doctoral dissertation presented for evaluation, I conclude that the Author has demonstrated a good level of theoretical knowledge and the necessary skills of independent scientific work.

I hereby represent that the PhD thesis by Lulu Hao, titled "A study on the Intercultural competence of English Majors in Chinese Universities", written under the supervision of dr hab. Dorota Misiejuk, prof. UwB meets the requirements set forth in the Act of 14 March, 2003 Law on Academic Degrees and Title as supplemented by the Law of Higher Education of 27 July, 2005 and I recommend that the Author be admitted to further stages of the procedure to complete her doctoral dissertation.

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