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Incorporating Internationalization and Translation in an Intercultural Classroom

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An examination of intercultural practices used in a culturally diverse classroom is essential given the globalization movement of the 21st century. The higher education, Western intercultural classroom is the ideal place to apply cross-cultural communication strategies in an effort to meet the educational needs of the culturally diverse student population. When defining internationalization and the need for translation, the call to adjust instructor pedagogy is put into effect as a means of providing a positive learning environment for all students, no matter their national origin. Internationalization, or the process of taking culturally specific material and making it more generalized in order to reach all students in an intercultural classroom, benefits both the students and the instructor. Although language is a potential barrier in the intercultural classroom, the call to use a hybrid form of translation through incorporating cultural norms of the diverse people groups in the Western classroom will build upon a positive learning environment for the students. However, in an attempt to utilize internationalization and translation in the intercultural classroom, instructors need to adjust their pedagogy by finding the right textbook, assessing the progress and success of the classroom, and seeking assistance from previously published material.

Keywords: globalization, internationalisation, translation, intercultural classroom

In the 21st century globalized world, the culturally diverse population representation that exists in both educational and work environments demands an examination of intercultural practices to use as a means of effectively communicating with those from other cultural backgrounds. One particular environment where

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cross-cultural communication strategies can be applied is the Western, higher education, intercultural classroom.

The international student representation in a Western university or college classroom is rising (Brown). With this increasingly culturally diverse representation happening in the Western classroom, instructors need to examine the ways in which they are meeting the educational needs of all students in an intercultural classroom.

As a result, there needs to be a consideration of the term internationalization and how the discourse benefits an intercultural classroom. Furthermore, the need for translation due to language barriers and hybrid forms of translation that can be utilized in an intercultural classroom should be discussed, and suggestions for adjusting instructor pedagogy in an effort to incorporate internationalization and translation in the intercultural classroom provided. These specific elements necessary in a Western intercultural classroom will be dissected and further explained in order to suggest a methodology of creating a positive learning environment for the international students.

The process of internationalization, as it applies to the Western intercultural classroom, requires that the instructor take material that is culturally specific and make it more generalized so that all students in an intercultural classroom can glean from a positive learning environment that invites a culturally diverse representation (St. Amant). Internationalization has beneficial rewards for both the student and the instructor when considering the importance of being culturally aware in a globally interdependent world. However, there is still concrete evidence of opposition to this forward progression of becoming more culturally aware in America, regardless of the growing culturally diverse representation that exists in the Western classroom (Hser).

Many researchers have dedicated time and effort into examining the varied facets of the growing culturally diverse population that exists in America today. Brown has used access to the Bureau of Census in order to determine how America is growing and changing in terms of culturally diverse people groups who are either immigrating to America, or utilizing the Western university system to pursue higher education opportunities. Brown provides some initial insight into the international representation in America when he states that “The ‘foreign-born’ in the United States are estimated to be 9.7% of the population or 25.8 million people” (338). A lot of these foreign-born are either identified as adult learners who are pursuing educational opportunities through the access to Western university campuses, or children of immigrants who will (hopefully) eventually pursue higher education through a Western university in years to come.

Hser recognizes the growing awareness of what it means to be a part of a globally interdependent world in the 21st century higher education context or global workplace and how there is an increased awareness of the globalization that is occurring. At the close of World War II, it was determined that “the United States could no longer consider itself geographically isolated” (Hser 35). Therefore, Hser identifies the need to seek opportunities to become more culturally aware and accepting of various cultural norms, especially when we look to the culturally diverse representation that exists in a Western higher education environment.

Although it is clear that the intercultural classroom is not something a higher education instructor of a Western university or college can escape, there is still opposition surrounding the call to create a positive learning environment for an intercultural class. Macdonald and Sundararajan touch briefly on the subject when they say an assimilationist approach, which assumes that the responsibility of assimilating to the Western classroom lies solely with the international student and is separated from the necessary adjustments of instructor pedagogy, is still being used in American universities today. Furthermore, research shows that “Anecdotal accounts reveal that this assimilationist approach persists today despite an increasing awareness of international student issues and needs” (Macdonald and Sundararajan 42). This brings us to the question of why there is such distinct opposition to the internationalization of an intercultural classroom.

In the research conducted by Hser, it is evidenced that “American professors were the least involved in international activities such as studying and doing research abroad. Also, fewer American professors agreed that connections with scholars in other countries were important for their professional work” (38-39). So, one of the issues that can be tied to why internationalization methods have not been used in the intercultural Western classroom is due to the fact that American professors choose to be ignorant about the different educational needs that exist between international and domestic students.

This ignorance to the benefits of becoming culturally aware is likely the reason for the adopted assimilationist approach in the intercultural classroom, as discussed through Macdonald and Sundararajan’s research. It becomes evident that many American professors are not willing to adjust instructor pedagogy and change their preconceived notions that lead them to believe that internationalization is not an important factor that changes the way a Western university instructor approaches an intercultural classroom. Furthermore, it has become apparent that some aspects including “lack of funding, lack of faculty participation, problems in study abroad programs, problems faced by international students, a negative perspective related to international student recruitment, and hindrances faced by

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foreign scholars – are the most common obstacles that prohibit the development of internationalization” (Hser 39). This negative perspective of potential hurdles for furthered cultural comprehension juxtaposes the theory that a development of cultural awareness and acceptance is essential, thus leading to the instructor’s inability to incorporate internationalization into an intercultural Western classroom.

Looking at the lack of funding alone, the call to incorporate internationalization in a Western intercultural classroom is further opposed because funding for the international runs the risk of being cut, reducing the opportunity for international students to experience financial support from the Western university, and therefore causing the Western university system to return their focus solely to the American students (Hser). So, essentially, if the Western university has taken measures to cut ties with the international students who could potentially be studying at the university, then there is a reduced need to incorporate internationalization in the Western classroom because opportunities for the international student have declined, and possibly, at times, depleted. Such adopted negative perspectives of building a culturally aware and accepting Western classroom environment clearly resists the call to include an element of internationalization in the intercultural Western classroom in an effort to create a positive learning environment for the international students. Although these perspectives may be held in many American higher educational institutes, there still needs to be an incorporation of internationalization used in the intercultural classroom in order to create a positive learning environment that will prepare the students for the globalizing work place. Hser believes that “Advocates for international education . . . should make a greater] effort to recruit more international students in order to create a diverse and multicultural campus and educate American students about the rest of the world” (Hser 42). As the aspect of internationalization is being considered, it is also vital that the element of translation also be examined.

The process of translation in an international environment entails the conversion of documents or verbal communication into various languages in order to communicate effectively (St. Amant). Focusing on the language differences alone, we can see where the gap for creating a positive learning environment for the international students exists in the Western classroom. However, the stride here is not to translate the assignments, discussions or activities of the Western intercultural classroom, but rather to incorporate a hybrid form of translation that allows for better cross-cultural communication to exist between the instructors, domestic students, and international students in the intercultural Western classroom.

As identified through Brown's research, language barriers for the international student are categorized under accent, lexicon, syntax, sociolinguistics, language as nationalism and transcription systems. These five barriers prove that language differences, which inevitably exist in an intercultural classroom, will create issues of effective communication, thus calling for a hybrid form of translation used by the instructors of an intercultural Western classroom.

Many of the international students will have trouble understanding the different accents within the Western culture, and to add to the dilemma of accent providing a language barrier, the multitude of regional accents have potential to further confuse an international student. Ultimately, "Accent becomes a barrier to communication if either party has difficulty understanding the other" (Brown 341). Lexicon refers to the words that build the vocabulary, and how the complexity of certain words can confuse an international. Syntax relates to the communication problems with internationals as a result of our complex sentence structures; "When we speak with long sentences containing many embedded phrases and dependent clauses, we often stretch the limits of the hearer" (Brown 341). Sociolinguistics is the "study of languages in their social settings" (Brown 341), which will vary for an international in a Western context. Language as nationalism is explained by Brown as rival cultures that share the same language, but have culturally opposing norms and behaviors. Finally, transcription systems is deemed a category of language barriers for an international because word meaning can be lost through the process of transcribing or translating the international's native language into English (Brown).

All five of these categorized language barriers hinder an international student's ability to communicate effectively in a Western context (Brown). However, Ulijn and Strother indicate that "certain aspects of international communication could leave monolingual, English-speaking technical communicators at a disadvantage" (qtd. in St. Amant 324), which includes the instructor of a Western, higher education, intercultural classroom. So, in an effort to create a positive learning environment for the international students, instructors of a Western intercultural classroom need to consider utilizing a hybrid form of translation in their classroom that will not leave them at a disadvantage when attempting to communicate effectively across cultural and language barriers.

Brown identifies through his research of the international adult learners who study in America that "[m]any of these international adult learners show up in the decennial census as residing in 'linguistically isolated households,' that is, households where English is neither spoken nor understood Roughly 3.4% of the American population lives in such households" (339). However, most inter-

national students will have to be proficient in English, so the suggestion here is not to use direct translation of language in order for the students to learn in an intercultural classroom, rather to meet the students on their terrain by incorporating cultural norms, practices, patterns, and ways of learning that will assist in the translation process of activities, classroom discussions, and course assignments.

One example is examined through Macdonald and Sundararajan claim that students from an international background will likely have difficulty being active in classroom discussion. This is commonly due to the fact that, "...international students' efforts to participate in the classroom are thwarted by the pace of the discussion and the speed of domestic students' speech" (Macdonald and Sundararajan 51). So, we can think of translation in this particular example in terms of simply slowing down the conversation, encouraging the articulation of English words, and minimizing the complex sentence structures commonly used in Western classroom discussions. Ultimately, incorporating this hybrid form of translation in the intercultural classroom will build upon the positive learning environment necessary for an international student to effectively learn. Dr. St. Amant suggests that "By remaining open to other cultures and languages and by rethinking translation use, English-speaking technical writers [and instructors] can increase their chances for success in the global environment [and intercultural classroom] of the 21st century" (St. Amant 326).

Upon considering the importance of incorporating internationalization and translation in the Western intercultural classroom, the next move is to calculate the adjustment of instructor pedagogy in order to incorporate both elements effectively into the intercultural classroom. If the target goal is achieving a positive learning environment for the international student, one hindrance to that goal might be the pedagogical approach that ensures material is converted for internationalization purposes, and a hybrid form of translation is utilized so that internationals are encouraged to participate in class discussions, activities, and assignments. It is through the examination of internationalization and translation that the need for instructor pedagogy adjustment is evidenced.

Barker and Matveeva touch on this element of reaching an intercultural classroom not only through changing the instructor pedagogical approach to the culturally diverse educational needs represented, but also through the support of textbook use. Because the way in which discussions, activities and assignments in a Western classroom can often be linked closely to the textbook(s) that is (are) used in an intercultural classroom, Barker and Matveeva call instructors to not only focus on the content of the textbook, but also on the situation (in particular, the intercultural representation of the classroom) in which the textbook is used.

These authors encourage instructors to consider the textbooks that are being used in the intercultural classroom so that the material in the textbooks represents students from a culturally diverse background when looking through the lens of awareness, information, and practice. These three elements suggest a strategic approach that will help the instructor analyze textbooks, consider the current information on the latest tools, discover multi-cultural sensitivity with the images used and strategies incorporated within the text, all with the goal to enhance the internationalization and translation efforts deemed appropriate for a Western intercultural classroom (Barker and Matveeva). Furthermore, the idea of awareness, or self-awareness, should be analyzed in textbook use, especially when considering the diverse population of a classroom, how to effectively train all students in the classroom for the globalizing workplace, and how activities in the textbook can advance self-awareness through the attempt to break the mold of ethnocentrism.

Once awareness has been addressed, it is important to determine the informational methods that are explored in the textbook and their appropriateness when addressing a Western intercultural classroom. Barker and Matveeva offered some insight regarding their approach to a culturally sensitive class. These authors explained, “In addition to assessing the presence of theoretical discussions, we also looked for examples (documents, letters, or websites) showing students the cultural characteristics that illustrated the theory in the informational elements” (194). The practice element is a pillar that should be present in the textbook when considering how to incorporate cultural differences when writing and communicating. If international students in the Western classroom need to understand what it means to communicate effectively with those from other cultures in the global workplace, then the instructor needs to evaluate the components of the textbook used for the intercultural class based on material and the methods used to present the textbook content.

Another method of encouraging the adjustment of instructor pedagogical approaches necessary for an intercultural classroom in a Western higher education context is through research. Getto suggests through his personal experience in an intercultural classroom, that *engaged design*, the process of considering the international students’ educational needs obtained through interviews and surveys, is important for the necessary pedagogical adjustments needed in the Western intercultural classroom, and this is done through incorporating the specifically discussed educational needs of the international students. Researching examples like Getto’s experience will further intensify the need to incorporate internationalization and translation in the Western intercultural classroom through adjusting instructor pedagogy.

An adequate way of assessing personal success in the intercultural classroom is to align the theories described in previous researchers' experiences, like Getto's study, with the personal adjustments made to instructor pedagogics in an effort to strive for similar outcomes in the intercultural classroom. When an instructor determines what forms of instruction worked for the intercultural classroom in the past through other authors' experiences, then they are able to make changes in the current intercultural classroom by adjusting instructor pedagogy accordingly. In terms of what has been discussed throughout this article, this could entail the incorporation of internationalization and translation in the Western intercultural classroom. Learning from the past and applying methods that led to success from previous studies conducted on the intercultural classroom will allow instructors to determine what methods to apply in order to make necessary pedagogical adjustments needed in the current intercultural classroom.

Johnson-Eiola and Selber's textbook *Solving Problems in Technical Communication* historicizes technical communication that can be applied to the intercultural classroom, prioritize the future of technical communication as intercultural representation in the classroom continues to grow, and guides instructors in terms of what they need to know for interacting in a culturally diverse environment. More specifically, the instructor of an intercultural, Western, higher education classroom should examine chapter 7 "What Can History Teach Us about Technical Communication?" by Longo & Fountain, chapter 8 "What is the Future of Technical Communication?" by Mehlenbacher, and chapter 19 "What Do Technical Communicators Need to Know about International Environments?" by St. Amant. Finally, Ulijn & Strother's book, *Communicating in Business and Technology: From Psycholinguistic Theory to International Practice*, provides another example of how instructors can use outside sources to help drive the pedagogical adjustments necessary for an intercultural classroom. In this book, Ulijn and Strother explain that professionals who speak languages other than English are contributing to scientific fields and communication venues more and more; therefore, Technical communicators should adjust their view and use translation, especially if they hope to remain effective communicators in the global marketplace. St. Amant cites these author's work when he explains that Psycholinguistics is the merging of Psychology and linguistics; thus, Psycholinguists focus their studies on the, "mental structures and operations that make communication possible in an attempt to understand how people use language to communicate and to understand how linguistic variables affect human behavior" (St. Amant 324).

Ultimately, there are many texts available in the technical and professional communications field that will define and advance the need for instructors in the globalizing 21st century to consider the international representation that exists both in the Western classroom and global workplace to adjust their pedagogies for an intercultural classroom. These texts will help create a need in the instructor's mind for the necessary pedagogical adjustments that are evidenced in the studies, research, and publications provided.

The intercultural classroom is continuously growing in terms of the various cultural people groups represented. The globalizing 21st century world reveals itself through the cultural diversity of both the Western classroom and the global workplace. As a result, the Westerner needs to be made more culturally aware and become more culturally accepting in an effort to create positive learning and work environments that invite all cultures to openly express norms, behaviors and patterns as a means of developing an effective cross-cultural communication avenue. Incorporating internationalization, specifically in the Western intercultural classroom, requires the instructors to take culturally specific material and make it more generalized so that all students in an intercultural class will glean from the positive, culturally aware, learning environment created by the instructor. Utilizing a hybrid form of translation in the intercultural classroom will also allow for language barriers to break down so that the international students will be able to engage with classroom discussions, activities and assignments. However, the incorporation of internationalization and translation in the intercultural classroom calls for the instructor of that classroom to make necessary adjustments to instructor pedagogies in order to create a positive learning environment for the international students.

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