

Cultural resistance in language learning: Teaching the use of German *Sie/Du* to Danish CLIL-students.

A natural locus for teaching intercultural competence is language teaching such as CLIL-courses where area-related topics are taught in a foreign language. However, the acquisition both of linguistic and intercultural competences may be hampered by resistance if a required linguistic behaviour violates students' ingrained Values, Attitudes, Beliefs and Norms (VABNs) (Maertz et al. 2009). Such resistance may be exacerbated in teaching situations in the students' native culture.

We illustrate this through the case of CLIL-courses taught in German in Denmark. In a German context the appropriate mode of address between professors and students in higher education is the polite form *Sie* and mastery of this form is an integral part of intercultural competence acquisition for Danish learners of German. We present data showing that the use of *Sie* in a Danish context causes considerable cultural resistance among Danish students. The students refuse to use *Sie* and some even react aggressively, stating "we are in Denmark at a Danish university and so must stick to the Danish conventions". At the same time, the very same students acknowledge the importance of knowing the German conventions of address and strive to use them correctly when in Germany even though they find this challenging.

We propose that the students' reaction is a reflection of *cultural cognitive dissonance* (Maertz et al. 2009). *Sie* is understood by Danish students as an expression of power distance which is intolerable in a Danish egalitarian context. However, using *Sie* appears to be acceptable abroad but not at home, suggesting that culturally shaped VABNs normally thought to be stable may in fact be situational. We further note that egalitarian values (in the Danish case) that are usually taken to facilitate intercultural interaction may, in fact, prove a barrier to cultural sensitivity.

References

Maertz, C. P., Hassan, A., & Magnusson, P. (2009). When learning is not enough: A process model of expatriate adjustment as cultural cognitive dissonance reduction. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 108(1), 66-78.

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