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**CULTURAL STUDIES IN THE BREXIT ERA:**

**IN-SERVICE TEACHERS’ AND STUDENTS’ VIEWS**

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**Abstract:** In the EU, the approach of Brexit affects many aspects of FLT and consequently the format as well as the core content of Cultural Studies of English-speaking countries, an academic subject designed to provide both Byram’s minimal content and intercultural communicative skills. On the basis of the theoretical background of the issue (the nature of modern Cultural Studies as seen e.g. by Michael Byram, Darla K. Deardoff, Kenneth Cushner and Jennifer Mahon), we present and (via the methods of grounded theory) analyze results of qualitative research based on 60 oral interviews with both Slovak and foreign-born teachers and students of Cultural Studies at various universities in Slovakia. After Brexit, teachers and students do not assume the minimizing of specialized Cultural Studies courses from university curricula for philologists or non-philologists, given that English is a *lingua franca* in business and communication and will remain so even after Brexit. However, both teachers and students feel the need for change in two areas: (1) In terms of course-content, teachers and students demand a shift towards a comparative approach (comparing two or more cultures, e.g. English, Slovak and selected aspects of the EU). Teachers and students of humanities demand updating of topics that represent selected culture or cultures. Teachers and students of Business English tend more toward representing global/world culture and intercultural business skills. (2) Methodologically, with regards to the target product of the course (a culturally and informationally competent student who is able to function in a variety of intercultural situations), there is a strong need for interculturality, interdisciplinarity and plurilinguism of the courses.

**Key words:** Brexit, Cultural Studies, interdisciplinarity, intercultural competence, plurilinguism

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1. **INTRODUCTION**−**CULTURAL STUDIES IN SLOVAKIA IN THE BREXIT ERA**

The approach of Brexit has an impact on many aspects of FLT and ELT in the EU. At present, English is a first foreign language at public primary schools in many members of the EU including Slovakia where it is also the most popular foreign language among high-school students (English with 96, 5%; German with 53, 6% coming second, followed by French, Spanish, Russian and Italian languages).1

It is hard to anticipate the precise effect of Brexit on language policy in the EU (after Brexit, English is likely to cease to exist as an official language of any EU country; Ireland and Malta chose their national languages as representational). It is a fact that the Slovak government has already suggested changes in its language policy, for example so-called “liberalisation” in the choice of the first foreign language at public primary schools. This proposal is made with the good intention to support plurilingualism; however, it will definitely affect the type and proportion of foreign languages at school.

Undoubtedly, such fundamental structural changes as the choice of the first foreign language will affect the proficiency in English at secondary schools and universities a few years later. As a result, the format and the core content of LT related disciplines at universities such as Cultural Studies (CS) of English-speaking countries (including British Cultural Studies, Intercultural Studies in Business or Intercultural Communication in Business) will be changed. CS serves as a traditional academic subject designed to provide both information in terms of Byram’s minimal content and skills e.g. intercultural communicative skills helping students to function not only in the target country and language and in the intercultural working environment effectively. In this study, we quantitatively analysed teachers and students’ opinions on the nature, content and perspectives of CS in the Brexit era and afterwards, i.e., post-Brexit in order to indicate the scope and type of changes necessary to keep the subject of CS relevant for present-day-students and educators.

1. **DETAILS EXPERIMENTAL** 
   1. **Research Methodology**

In order to obtain relevant data, we decided on empirical qualitative research via 60 face-to-face oral interviews (recorded from November 2018 to July 2, 2019 with teachers and students of Matej Bel University with the seat in Banská Bystrica and Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia), divided into two samplings. Sample 1 consisted of 20 professional national and international teachers of CS at Slovak universities. Sample 2 included 20 university students of linguistics (future teachers, translators and interpreters) and 20 university students of business. In a controlled interview, teachers were asked to speak on their own about three topics, including their view of the future of CS after Brexit, their views of the gist of CS at their academic institution and preferred methodology of CS.

University students discussed three analogical topics: What do they expect to learn in the courses of CS, i.e. English, American, Canadian Studies and Culture Studies in Business offered in their university curricula; the preferred methodology of CS and their anticipation of the role of CS after Brexit. Processing data via grounded theory and the system of encoding, we generated recurring statements related to the present and future of CS, as seen by both students and teachers, and categorized them into general statements. Finally, we compared research findings with current expert discourse on the nature of CS, and formulated research outcomes.

**2.2.**    **Teachers’ and Students’ Views of the Nature of Cultural Studies**

Sample corpus 1 consisted of 20 university teachers of CS, both national (16) and international−English, American, Polish and Russian (4). Respondents 1-10 worked as teachers of CS at faculties of humanities, preparing future teachers, translators and interpreters for whom foreign language plays a *crucial role* in their professional future.  Respondents 11-20 were teachers of CS at business-oriented universities in Slovakia, preparing future business executives for whom the language serves as an *instrument* enhancing intercultural competence in their future business profession. Teachers were to answer and/or discuss three questions:

Q1: Do you expect any changes in the nature of CS after Brexit?

Q2: What do you consider the gist of CS at your academic institution?

Q3: With respect to methodology, how should the culture of the target country be taught presently?

Analysis of teachers’ responses demonstrated several significant phenomena: first, in relation to Q1, even though teachers anticipated minor changes in language policy of Slovakia, none of the teachers expected dramatic changes in the scope of English and CS after Brexit, as English is a well-established language of communication, translation and interpreting and business. For example, T2 pointed out, *English is a part of an open-language circuit, as such it will hardly be removed from language 1 position by other languages, whatever the proportion of their population in the EU may be.*

In response to Q2, all the teachers preferred the modern-style complex, holistic and integrative content of CS to simply information-based delivery that dominated East-European regions prior to the 1990s. For example, T3 noted, the gist of CS is *...to develop the themes dealing with global issues and stressing the qualities of local culture, and comparisons with local culture. All this is tied in, not only with geography, but also with the British history course, as well.*

However, there were differences between the approaches of teachers of philological, as opposed to non-philological disciplines: Several teachers at philological faculties (T 1-10) stressed the need for change in CS and the transformable and changeable nature of CS. For example, T4 mentioned the *amorphous, shape-shifting subject* of CS, saying *I would try to focus on contemporary (fluid) attitudes & values as we see them manifested in the daily news. For a course in Slovakia, I would try to make meaningful comparisons with issues there and in world events. For me, I do not recommend a one-curriculum-fits-all approach for such an amorphous, kaleidoscopic subject as* [Cultural] *Studies. It depends very much on the teacher.*

Some philological teachers further suggested teaching about attitudes, values, i.e. about more abstract reflections of the material world and its economic and political situation, e.g. T1 mentioned a successful graduate who is capable to function as a *primary inter-mediary* of culture; T2, 3 and T4 mentioned teaching *topics* that help students to get organized within the new culture. Further, respondents suggested innovative teaching methods that would secure for the graduates of the course ways and procedures leading to better interpretation of the world.

Teachers of CS for business (specifically T11, 12, 13, 14, 16 and 17) stressed more Culture-General approach to developing cultural awareness with the aim to understand the differences and cultural diversity in today’s international business. Each of the respondents (T11-20), in their own words mentioned teaching *comparative* aspect of CS. T7 for example, pointed out that the gist of CS in Slovakia is the *comparison of two systems and “all that refers to them”; comparison of Slovak culture and foreign culture or cultures to understand the differences in doing business internationally.* Moreover, the comparison relied on a wider spectrum of cultural phenomena, as the target culture is not only represented by the English-world, but by a variety of world cultures generally encountered in business life. For example, T12 considered the *study of cultural factors that influence international business and critical encounters* crucial for CS. T14 stressed that *…teaching intercultural competence and special language for economic disciplines integrating linguistic and cultural component* [as well as] *developing general cultural awareness in order to understand the complexity of today’s multicultural world and its challenges* is of key importance for modern CS*.*

Sampling 2 consisted of 20 university students of linguistics and 20 university students of business who have finished the course of CS. 20 students majored in English linguistics; 20 students were studying business. Out of these, 13 students were of Slovak origin, seven students were international (coming from Belgium, Finland, Turkey, Belarus, Hungary and Poland). Students were asked to answer three questions (Q4, Q5 and Q6), similar to corpus 1:

Q4: Do you expect any changes in the nature of CS after Brexit?

Q5: What do you expect to learn in the courses of CS (i.e. English, American and Canadian Studies and Intercultural Relations in Business offered in your university curriculum) that will be necessary for your studies and future career?

Q6: With respect to methodology, how should the cultures of the target countries be taught presently?

In terms of Q4, students were positive about the dominant role of English after Brexit; they believed or hoped there will not be any changes or no dramatic changes in the language policy. English, given it is well established in the EU markets will remain the *language of communication* (S2).Only one Erasmus (Turkish) student anticipated more significant changes. S1 and 9 expected some competition for the position of Language no. 1: *I think other countries with other languages will claim their right to priority, e.g. Spain or Germany.* S20 shared the same views: *There might be less English after Brexit in the EU. I assume other countries, Germany, France, will lobby to get to the forefront.* S16 expressed her worries of the forthcoming changes: *Brexit is what worries me* […] *It will affect all of us, the whole Europe. And the English language too. There might even be a Scottish referendum.* Erasmus student S19 understood the role of world culture in presentation of cultures of English-speaking countries: *So yes, there will be changes, more countries should be taken into consideration when learning business and culture of future partners.* Thus, he understood the need for a shift from a Culture-Specific to a Culture-General approach in teaching.

In relation to Q5, student respondents generally understood the importance of CS, the content and skills they gain in the course when studying foreign language or language for business. S2, 9 and 10 enjoy CS; moreover S2 wishes to *teach* (in his future) *students how to become aware of cultural differences.* S1 calls CS *an indispensable part of learning the language*; S14 understood the importance of English as a *global language.*

In relation to Q6, methodologically, some students appreciated practical aspects of CS; e.g., S3 and S5 understood the importance of CS for expanding their lexicon and improving their English (S4); specifically *expert* English (S8). S4 considers CS important for their studies and future career. S11 realized how important English is in intercultural working environment (*future job*). S15 particularly enjoyed learning practical aspects of business conduct (e.g. how to behave in business meetings and negotiations). Other students focused on more abstract aspects of learning about a new culture; e.g., S13 enjoyed gaining knowledge about specific aspects of other cultures (multiculturalism). S11 found CS an incentive to learn more about other countries, whereas S2 was pleased by becoming *more knowledgeable* in all areas of daily life in the new culture.  S19 understood the global importance of CS; admitting *we need CS to learn about different cultures, not just one culture, but the whole world.*

1. **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Analysis of the 60 oral interviews via the method of grounded theory proved that:

(1)   According to teachers of CS as well as students, English will remain the *lingua franca* (working language) in world businessin the EU even after Brexit as it is so well-established in and outside EU. Brexit, however, might affect the proportion of CS courses in EU states, namely in Slovakia. Students find CS helpful and necessary for their language command and future career.

(2)  Teachers at business institutions demanded a shift of CS from Culture-Specific British Cultural Studies towards a more Culture-General (learning about world cultures).

(3)  In terms of methodology and content, both groups of teachers tend toward comparative approach. However, whereas CS teachers at philological institutions focused more on updating topics, teachers of BE focus on more interactive approach such as projects, simulations, problem solving and dealing with critical incidents enhancing students’ competence in world business.

In terms of Q1 and Q4 (Do you anticipate any changes in CS after Brexit); related to the overall significance of English culture in the EU after Brexit, there was not a difference between teachers and students’ views. In spite of some rise of other languages, respondents did not expect significant changes in the proportion of English language in national curricula; neither had they expected minimisation of the scope or content of CS.  Business students even required more opportunities to study culture, e.g., more courses and number of teaching hours; they were aware of the fact that without choosing the optional CS course they would have never acquired this knowledge and cultural overview.

In these views, they concur with researcher and translator Emma Seddon who claims that English will remain the principal working language following Brexit, because switching to only French or German, or adding another language, would be unrealistic and require a huge investment in training by the EU. However, Seddon anticipates changes in the nature of English; “…if Britain leaves the EU, there will be a dramatically reduced pool of native English speakers to recruit from, because you need to have an EU passport to work in the institutions. As people retire, fewer native speakers will work in the EU, meaning they will have less and less influence on and authority over the use of English in these contexts. This means “EU English” will likely move away from British English at a faster pace.”2 Accordingly, Brexit will not affect the overall importance of CS and their representation in national curricula. Ginsburgh, on the other hand, disagrees: “After Brexit, English can no longer retain its status as one of the EU’s official or working languages”3, supporting his views with demographical and geographical arguments.

As far as Q2 and Q6 (What is the gist of CS?) were concerned, several respondents were aware of the necessity of changes. The most significant change allocated by respondents was a shift of the gist of CS towards a wider global perspective (teaching world culture). In this, respondents generally comply with the existing research and institutional solutions, such as Pacific Coast Conference for British Studies (PCCBS) which attempted to redefine the nature of British Cultural Studies in the modern era of Brexit.4 According to Stephen Jackson Brexit will definitely affect scholarship on CS (specifically British Cultural Studies) and teaching of the subject resulting in “substantive alternations to courses.”5

Finally, in terms of CS methodology-related Q3 and Q6 (How should be culture of the target country taught?), teachers tended methodologically towards a comparative approach and teaching intercultural competences. Especially the latter research, outcome agrees with modern methodology of CS.  Byram et al. agree on the importance of cultivating intercultural competencies rather than gathering information. In their views the intercultural dimension of teachers (and the learners) does not mean “more knowledge of other countries and cultures but […] skills that allow them to take risks in their thinking and feeling; such skills are best developed in practice and in reflection on experience.”6 In these views, Byram’s views are also reflected in the Deardorff’s model of intercultural competence that considers intercultural competence to be “the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions.”7 However, we also recognize the key role of the teacher in the process of presenting a new culture in interaction with one’s own, even *dominant* to the selected teaching method.8

Based on these examples we can assert that CS is currently undergoing a period of transformation. Teachers ought to respond accordingly and adjust CS courses and the range of methods to teach culture to respond to real cultural contexts in order to cultivate intercultural sensitivity, communication and interaction skills. The scope of CS content should shift from Culture-Specific to Culture-General (responding to global issues) approach. We believe that the content of CS as part of intercultural education should include the study of world cultures and not overlook the extent of globalization; otherwise it may “…ill-serve both its subjects and wider social understanding.”9

**CONCLUSION**

It is difficult to predict the post-Brexit landscape. Undoubtedly, the implications of Brexit expand to many fields, including international and European politics, social life and culture; also to many academic disciplines that need redefinition of their contents and methods. Scholarship regarding the effects of Brexit on the European and global society, including its effect on culture and arts is constantly increasing. With Brexit becoming a reality within weeks, it is high time also to adjust teaching English and foreign languages to the current political and cultural situation. For CS as a subject closely connected with present-day global situation, it is essential to follow social changes. Practically, it means shifting the subject closer to a more democratic and liberal presentation of culture, and not as an autonomous entity, related to a single historical territory, e.g., Great Britain but as a part of a bigger matrix, the world culture.

In this study, on the micro-situation of Slovakia (teachers’ and students’ views of the CS *status quo* and their anticipation of the future of the subject), we demonstrated possible future trends in CS demanded by educators and university students within the transforming EU; i.e., the shift from single-cultural to poly-cultural approach, from Culture-Specific to Culture-General with updated and relevant social and cultural topics presented by a comparative rather than declarative method.

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