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COGNITIVE, AFFECTIVE AND LINGUISTIC CONSEQUENCES OF ETHNOCENTRISM IN APPREHENSIVES' COMMUNICATION

Communication apprehension, identified with feelings of tension or embarrassment experienced in social interaction, induces an array of communication avoidance behaviors. Meanwhile ethnocentrism, with its negative view on other cultures, implies a tendency to avoid communication with persons of different cultures, as well. The cumulative effect of both phenomena may induce the catastrophic effects of communication withdrawal, connected with deprecating views on other cultures or their representatives. The uniqueness of the speech event and uncertainty caused by the cultural differences, augmented by the lack of skills and knowledge about the interlocutor, provokes anxiety.

The findings of this empirical study on the relationship between ethnocentrism and communication apprehension taking place in the foreign language classroom demonstrate that students with high levels of communication apprehension display higher levels of ethnocentrism in comparison to their non-apprehensive peers, mainly due to their cognitive, affective, and linguistic barriers.

Living in the constantly changing modern world, often called 'a global village', is inextricably connected with a growing demand to communicate with speakers of other national backgrounds. The need to use different languages in the era of globalization and international migration has prompted linguists and pedagogues to take an interest in effective foreign language instruction. However, even expert teaching may fail in the case of students who have a problem with communication in general, as in the case of communication apprehensives, who experience a type of anxiety that affects interpersonal communication carried out in the mother tongue (Horwitz 2002). Also, their problems may increase due to ethnocentrism, understood as the experience of seeing one's own culture as superior to others. For this reason the ways in which one approaches the task of communication by means of a foreign language may be largely influenced by their attitude to communication, as well as by their understanding of the role of

their own culture in intercultural communication. Consequently, the main aim of this paper is to shed light on the relationship between ethnocentrism and communication apprehension in the foreign language (FL) classroom, as revealed by Polish adolescents learning English. For this purpose, first the issues in question are explained from the perspective of foreign language acquisition (FLA). Then the results of an empirical research carried out in the context of Polish secondary grammar school devoted to the issue are analyzed and discussed.

1. Communication apprehension

In early studies communication apprehension was characterized as “a broadly based anxiety related to oral communication” (McCroskey 1970 in McCroskey and Beatty 1984: 79). According to another definition, it was termed as “the fear or anxiety an individual feels about orally communicating” (Daly 1991: 3). Nevertheless, later the term was expanded and redefined as “a broad-based fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey 1976: 3). Nowadays it may also be viewed as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey 1982: 137). This shift in approach to the construct of communication apprehension, originally restricted to talking, indicates that it now encompasses all modes of communication. As well, communication apprehension has been recorded in small groups and dyads, although it is mostly linked to the anxiety felt by individuals before public appearances or speeches.

Communication apprehension is viewed as an apprehension trait, which means that it designates a person’s stable disposition to feel consistently anxious in a number of communicative situations across a variety of circumstances, such as time, situations, and contexts (Richmond and Roach 1992). The phenomenon is directly connected with communication avoidance (McCroskey, Fayer, and Richmond 1985), because individuals who generally fear communication also tend to evade it. Therefore the term of communication apprehension is intertwined with other communication avoidance constructs, such as stage fright or performance anxiety.

This type of anxiety, identified with feelings of tension or embarrassment experienced in social interaction, particularly with strangers (Manning and Ray 1993), plays a very important part in the understanding of the cognitive processes giving rise to specific communicative behaviors. Aside from the obvious characteristics of an apprehensive individual (withdrawal, a fearful and anxious reaction to communicative situations), there are specific cognitive process taking place, such as “(1) perceptions of low personal competency, (2) an inability to identify appropriate social behaviors, and (3) anticipation of negative outcomes to interaction” (Greene and Sparks 1982: 1-2). Due to one’s inability to identify communication behaviors leading to the realization of the desired interaction

goal, a state of apprehension arises. It leads to lowering one's self-image, and expectations of further failure.

A high level of communication apprehension is connected with excessive attention to the self, giving way to poorer performance in public speaking situations (Daly, Vangelisti, and Lawrence 1989). A greater self-focus narrows the cognitive capacity, and leads to missing external cues and opportunities to adapt to audience reactions. At the same time, a greater concern with evaluation, performance, and other self-related issues results in more negative thinking. It should also be noted that in most cases the communication process is associated with pleasant experiences. However, in the case of a highly apprehensive person positive expectations are replaced by negative ones, or at least by the absence of positive ones (reward), accompanied by feelings of tension or embarrassment. This is why a highly apprehensive individual may not be willing to engage in communication.

One's apprehension about communicating can prevent effective communication even when an apprehensive individual possesses satisfactory skills. As a result, it is often impossible to distinguish an apprehensive communicator unable to communicate from an incompetent communicator who fails at the task because of a lack of skills (Fordham and Gabbin 1996). It should also be stressed that an individual must voluntarily display their communication skills, lest others perceive them negatively. Yet, requiring the individual to participate in a communication exchange, regardless of their communication apprehension levels, may aggregate their deficiencies, and lead to opposite effects (Borzi and Mills 2001).

It is stipulated that, as a volitional act that is cognitively processed, it is the individual's choice whether to communicate or not (McCroskey and Richmond 1990). It is also a powerful inhibitor of an individual's involvement in communication activities. For this reason communication apprehension is often conceptualized as a "continuum" that can be experienced differently by the same person, depending on the situation, audience, and type of communication activity (Kuhlemeier, van den Bergh and Rijlaarsdam 2002).

The causes of communication apprehension may spring from situational settings, such as public speaking, and the individual's personality traits (Osman et al. 2010). Its existence is often explained by a mixture of factors, attributed to several main sources (Daly 1991). Among them is *genetics*, exposing communication apprehension as an inherited behavioral trait. The root of this characteristic may as well be attributed to *personal history*, when communication apprehension develops as a conditioned response following negative experiences evoked by one's communication attempts. Also, *learned helplessness*, a concept proposing that after recurring punishment or failure individuals become passive even in spite of high chances of success (Peterson and Seligman 1983), is a perspective that enables us to attribute the roots of behavioral regression in the verbal field to a lack of consistent and rewarding patterns for verbal communication behaviors. Another explanation for communication apprehension deals with children's *early*

communication skills acquisition, limited by adult expectations of the child's verbal exchange with the environment, or the time the verbal communication mechanism in the child starts to be stimulated. Aside from that, the *models of communication* that can be found in the immediate environment of the child can serve as a basis for developing communication apprehension (Piechurska-Kuciel 2008).

The effects of communication apprehension may be numerous, touching upon every aspect of one's social life. Most of all, high apprehension about communication leads to ineffective communication that can be divided into three basic types of behavioral effects: communication avoidance, communication withdrawal, and communication disruption. As far as avoidance is concerned, apprehensive communicators choose not to speak with others, may take occupations with lower communication requirements, select less conspicuous seats in the classroom, or sit in small groups where they are less likely to interact. In the case of communication withdrawal, mostly when avoidance is impossible, such people talk less than others, fall absolutely silent, or talk as much as is absolutely required. In class they talk only when called upon. Communication disruption, on the other hand, leads to unnatural nonverbal behavior or faltering verbal presentation (McCroskey 1981), when one disrupts their speaking patterns through vocalized pauses, such as *umm...*, *you know...* or *well...*

In effect, a high level of communication apprehension "can impede an individual's communication ability and social opportunity" (Francis and Miller 2008: 39). In the educational context it leads to lower overall school achievement as measured by standardized tests, lower final grades in all courses, as well as to negative attitudes on the part of highly apprehensive students (McCroskey 1977). It has also been demonstrated that high communication apprehension has a very negative impact on learning in most instructional environments. This specifically refers to the classroom setting, because it may be a powerful activator of many apprehensive behaviors in its own right (Thurlow and Marwick 2005), not to mention such social influences, as tedium, conflicts with the teacher, or inattention. It has been found that individuals with high levels of communication apprehension find it more difficult to become and remain members of an organization (Richmond and Roach 1992). They are usually perceived as less competent, less successful, require more training, and have difficulty establishing positive relationships with others.

Generally speaking, there are three universal tenets underlying the effects of communication apprehension. First of all, individuals who experience high levels of the emotion will avoid and/or withdraw from oral interaction with others. Second, as a result of that avoidance/withdrawal, they will be seen in a poor light by themselves and others. Third, this poor image brings economic, political, and academic consequences. Overall then, if individuals cannot communicate effectively, they will not develop to their full potential (Charlesworth 2006).

The aim of this research is to shed more light on ethnocentrism in students with high and low levels of communication apprehension. For this purpose, the

focus of the following section is to shed more light on ethnocentrism and its influence on communication in the foreign language.

2. Ethnocentrism

Communication with people of other nations does not only imply using a language understandable to the interlocutors, but also the existence of many other factors, like social distance, whose presence may lead to dysfunctional communication (Gudykunst and Kim 2002). Positive emotional responses evoked by communicating with speakers of a foreign language allow interactants to understand their own feelings and behaviors and those of their partners, fostering better communication (Chen 2010). This understanding generates respect and appreciation of cultural differences (Chen 2005).

However, positive feelings in the L2 communication process may be diminished by strong feelings of ethnocentrism. Sumner introduced the term in 1906 to denote a “view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (13). Since that time, it has been redefined to indicate “our defensive attitudinal tendency to view the values and norms of our culture as superior to other cultures, and we perceive our cultural ways of living as the most reasonable and proper ways to conduct our lives” (Ting-Toomey 1999: 157). Ethnocentrism can also be understood as “an attitudinal construct that involves a strong sense of ethnic group self-centeredness and self-importance” (Bizumic et al. 2009: 874). It follows that it caters for “identity scrutiny, in-group inclusion, and predictability” (158), by placing one’s own cultural or ethnic group in the center of everything, and by scaling and rating others with reference to it (Neuliep 2002). Consequently, it may be assumed that ethnocentrism is connected with general ethnic group self-centeredness. It embodies “the notion that one’s own culture is superior to any other” (Nanda and Warms 1998:6), because individuals tend to measure other cultures by the degree to which they live up to their own cultural norms.

The contemporary approaches to ethnocentrism follow two main trends. The first one is connected with intergroup expressions of ethnocentrism, proposing that the issue focuses on the belief that the ingroup is more important than other groups. The other trend concentrates on intragroup expressions of ethnocentrism, postulating that the ingroup is more important than its individual member (Bizumic et al. 2009). Understandably, with its focus on a strong certainty in one’s beliefs (Keith 2012), ethnocentrism can be considered entwined with quite normal and natural tendencies connected with fulfilling individual and collective needs. Thanks to it, group members are bonded, feeling “proud of their own heritages by subjectively using their cultural standards as criteria for interpretations and judgments in intercultural communication” (Chen and Starosta 2005: 27). As Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) propose, due to the process of socialization within a community and culture, all people have some

degree of ethnocentrism. For this reason it may be characterized as occurring along a continuum. In its positive form, ethnocentrism plays an important role when one's cultural group is attacked or at risk. In such a situation it can be considered a foundation for patriotism and willingness to sacrifice for the group (*ibid.*). The group can therefore survive, maintain its individual identity and culture, and compete with other groups (Smooha 1987).

However, aside from nourishing a group's pride, necessary for a culture to survive, ethnocentrism also breeds vanity and looks on outsiders or outgroups with contempt. Using one's own group as the center of one's perspective leads to the development of prejudice, because other groups may always appear inferior to the one that is in the center (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995). The negative bias towards the outgroups causes individuals to perceive their own norms and opinions as more right than others (Chen 2010). Understandably, ethnocentrism is often called "the synonym for general antipathy towards all outgroups" (Berry and Kalin 1995:303). Hence, in extreme cases a high level of ethnocentrism may induce one to view their culture as the most influential, and desire other cultures to accept its values and beliefs. It follows that a certain degree of ethnocentrism from members of a cultural community may be needed for a culture to survive. Then again, when the level of ethnocentrism is too high, it will obstruct the communication process between people from different cultures, because they are equipped with dissimilar culturally conditioned values, emotional dispositions, and behaviors (Neuliep, Chaudoir, and McCroskey 2001). Because of this bias they are likely to misjudge others' intentions or conduct.

The empirical research on ethnocentrism demonstrates that it leads to misunderstandings (Neuliep and McCroskey 1997) and limited levels of intercultural willingness to communicate (Lin and Rancer 2003). With its negative impact on culture-specific and culture-general understanding, breeding misperceptions about the behavior of culturally different individuals (Gudykunst and Kim 1997), ethnocentrism may reduce intercultural communication competence (Wiseman, Hammer and Nishida 1989). Moreover, high levels of ethnocentrism are connected with diminished interest in intercultural interaction (Neuliep et al. 2001), which can also be attributed to little knowledge of another culture, decreasing people's intercultural communication competence. Along these lines, the studies by Wrench et al. (2006) or Justen (2009) confirm the negative impact of ethnocentrism on this type of communication, exposing the importance of a lack of mutual understanding.

Given that ethnocentrism (Neuliep, Hintz and McCroskey 2005) implies a tendency to "circumvent communication with persons of different cultures" (Neuliep 2002: 203), it can be fairly concluded that it is a serious obstacle to intercultural communication. It then seems justified to analyze the relationship between ethnocentrism and communication apprehension, both of which focus on reduced communication. As far as communication apprehension is concerned, it should be noted that the communication avoidance it evokes significantly limits chances for a successful development of foreign language skills in an apprehensive

student. What is more, the feelings of anxiety or awkwardness experienced in social interaction, particularly with strangers, are a very likely occurrence when communicating with speakers from other cultures. Similarly, ethnocentrism leads one to decline from the participation in intercultural interaction, though due to different reasons. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect of both characteristics may bring about the catastrophic effects of communication withdrawal, connected with deprecating views on other cultures or their representatives.

Communication apprehension, exacerbated by the lack of knowledge about the FL interactant, provokes a further increase of uncertainty because the uniqueness and vagueness caused by the cultural differences is high (Gudykunst 1995). Consequently, more apprehensive individuals can be expected to be even less willing than usual to partake in intercultural interaction (Gudykunst and Nishida 2001), achieving high levels of intercultural reticence. Reasonably enough, a significant degree of ethnocentrism in a communication apprehensive may obstruct communicating in a language they have not yet mastered with a person they have not met before, and eventually serve as a face saving excuse aimed at concealing the individual's genuine or imagined lack of communication skills in a foreign language.

As a result, for the purpose of this paper the following hypothesis is formulated:

H: Students with high levels of communication apprehension display high levels of ethnocentrism in comparison to their non-apprehensive peers.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of the study were 621 students from 20 randomly selected classes of the six secondary grammar schools in Opole, southwestern Poland. In the sample there were 396 girls and 225 boys (mean age: 16.50, range: 15-18, SD=.53). They were first grade students, with three to six hours a week of compulsory English instruction. Their level of proficiency in this language was lower intermediate, with the average length of their English language experience of almost nine years, with a vast majority (above 90%) learning it for five to 15 years. Apart from English, they also studied another compulsory foreign language: French or German (four to two lessons a week). The participants came from different residential locations, mostly urban (286 of them from the city of Opole, 122 from neighboring towns), with 213 students from rural regions.

On the basis of the students' level of communication apprehension (McCroskey 1982), the sample was divided into quartiles. The lower quartile (called LCA) comprised 161 students with low levels of Communication Apprehension, who obtained 56 or fewer points on the Communication Apprehension scale (PRCA-24) (92 girls and 69 boys). The upper quartile (HCA) comprised 170 participants

characterized by high levels of communication apprehension, with 72 and more points on the PRCA-24 scale (120 girls and 50 boys). The two middle quartiles were excluded from further analysis.

3.2. Instruments

The basic instrument adopted for the purpose of the research was a questionnaire. It included the demographic variables: age, gender (1 – *male*, 2 – *female*), and place of residence (1 – *village: up to 2,500 inhabitants*, 2 – *town: from 2,500 to 50,000 inhabitants*, 3 – *city: over 50,000 inhabitants*).

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) (McCroskey 1982 in McCroskey et al. 1985), used for dividing the participants into quartiles, constituted the next part of the questionnaire. It contains 24 items assessing participants' apprehension in the communication contexts of public speaking, speaking in meetings, small groups, and in dyads. Sample items include: *While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous* or *My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech*. Students indicate the degree to which they agree with each statement on a Likert scale from 1 – *I strongly agree* to 5 – *I strongly disagree*. The scale's reliability in the present study was .77.

There was also a scale measuring ethnocentrism, called *The Revised Generalized Ethnocentrism (GENE) Scale*, designed by Neuliep and McCroskey (1997). It estimates levels of ethnocentrism connected with experiencing discomfort when confronting the possibility of communication with someone from another ethnic or cultural group. It consisted of 24 negatively and positively worded items, which were then key-reversed. Sample items in the scale were: *I respect the values and customs of other cultures* or *People from other cultures act strange and unusual when they come into my culture*. In each item a Likert scale was provided, expanding from 1 (*I strongly disagree*) to 5 (*I strongly agree*). The minimum number of points was 24, while the maximum was 120. Its reliability was .70, assessed in terms of Cronbach's alpha.

Students also assessed the *length of their English instruction* by stating the number of years indicating how long they had studied the language in a formal context (private classes, school education, etc.)

Another instrument used in the study was a scale calculating *self-perceived levels of FL skills* (speaking, listening, writing and reading). It was an aggregated value of separate assessments of the FL skills with a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*unsatisfactory*) to 6 (*excellent*). The minimum number of points on the scale was 4, while the maximum was 24. The scale's reliability was Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$.

The last source of data was final *grades*; more specifically, the aggregated value of the previous year's grade and the prospective semester and final grades. They were assessed by means of the Likert scale ranging from 1 – *unsatisfactory* to 6 – *excellent*. The scales reliability was $\alpha = .87$.

3.3. Procedure

The data collection procedure took place in February and March of 2010. In each class, the students were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The time designed for the activity was 15 to 45 minutes. The participants were asked to give sincere answers without taking excessive time to think. A short statement introducing a new set of items in an unobtrusive manner preceded each part of the questionnaire.

The data were computed by means of the statistical program STATISTICA, with the main operations being descriptive statistics (means and *SD*), correlations, and an inferential statistics operation: a t-test for independent samples. It is used to compare the performance of two groups (students with low and high levels of communication apprehension) on the scale measuring their ethnocentrism.

4. Results

First the means, SD and correlations for all the variables were calculated (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD) and correlations of the study variables (N=621)

Variable	M	SD	2	3	4	5
1. Communication apprehension	64.34	12.20	.08*	-.07	-.17***	-.01
2. Ethnocentrism	71.66	8.00	–	.01	-.02	-.03
3. Length of L2 study	8.94	2.50	–	–	.36***	.25***
4. FL skills	15.75	3.51	–	–	–	.53***
5. Grades	12.21	2.48	–	–	–	–

* $p \leq .05$, *** $p < .001$

The results showed that communication apprehension is very weakly correlated with ethnocentrism, though in a statistically significant way. In the next step a t-test for independent samples was performed. Its outcomes are presented in Table 2 below.

The comparative analyses confirmed the significant differences on the measurement of ethnocentrism in students with high and low communication apprehension levels ($t = -2.21^*$). These students also differed significantly on their self-assessment of FL skills.

Table 2: A between-group comparison of students with low and high levels of communication apprehension

Variable	LCA (N=161)		HCA (N=170)		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Ethnocentrism	71.14	8.35	73.02	7.14	-.2.21*
Length of L2 study	9.10	2.52	8.79	2.58	1.09
FL skills	16.67	3.45	15.17	3.45	3.95***
Grades	12.49	2.22	12.52	2.47	.91

* $p \leq .05$, *** $p < .001$

5. Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to corroborate the hypothesis according to which *students with high levels of communication apprehension display higher levels of ethnocentrism in comparison to their non-apprehensive peers*. Indeed, such a result was found, notably contributing to the discussion on the interplay of communication apprehension and ethnocentrism.

As proposed by the research in the field, communication apprehension is a special form of anxiety that seriously limits the individual's engagement in communication in general. Obviously, the situation is even worse in the FL classroom, where a strong emphasis is put on the development of communicative skills. Learning a foreign language is connected with practically using a language that has not been fully mastered in various interpersonal communication situations. Unfortunately for communication apprehensives, in order to learn the foreign language students need to talk (MacIntyre et al. 2003), regardless of their personal preferences or character traits. Thus the type of fear experienced within the native language context (communication apprehension as a trait) is further augmented by the requirement of using the language in which conveying one's mature thoughts is extremely stressful, if not impossible in the case of low achievers or beginners.

Due to higher levels of communication apprehension a foreign language student may have three options in interacting in the FL classroom. First of all, they may avoid communicative activities by not attending classes or coming late for the lesson. However, in a case when communication cannot be escaped, their withdrawal is a likely choice. Apprehensive students become very reticent, and avoid direct eye contact with the teacher in order not to draw attention to themselves. Apart from that, when forced to communicate, their FL speech may be barely comprehensible, faulty, frequently interrupted with long pauses and hesitations, simplified, and limited by vocabulary or unfinished sentences (Piechurska-Kuciel 2011).

Broadly speaking, the connection between communication apprehension and ethnocentrism can be explained by the presence of cognitive, affective and linguistic barriers hampering effective communication between people from different cultures. First of all, communication apprehensives are not willing to seek satisfaction from communicating in general, not to mention communicating with strangers. However, when such interaction is inescapable, it seems obvious that their negative emotions are strengthened by uncertainty and anxiety. Under the influence of uncertainty, they tend to be convinced that they are unable to predict the strangers' behavior and become even more uncomfortable. Also, high anxiety causes them to interpret such behavior using their own cultural frames of reference. Hence, in the case of the present study, Polish communication apprehensives become blind followers of their own cultural patterns, unable to correctly interpret strangers' actions.

To make things worse, the medium of communication is another factor that deteriorates the apprehensives' affective responses to the communicative demands, as language differences are a significant communication barrier. First of all, as the study results demonstrate, in spite of their seemingly sufficient language progress revealed by their final grades and the length of FL study, apprehensives self-assess their FL abilities at a significantly lower level than non-apprehensives (false misconceptions). It may then be inferred that their anxiety levels reduce their abilities to objectively calculate the level of their skills; especially because no statistical differences can be noted between apprehensive and non-apprehensive students in their final grades.

Nevertheless, ethnocentrism also plays a very significant role in the general communicative behavior of apprehensives. First of all, the ethnocentric apprehensive's predictions about their inability to judge the FL speaker's behavior are enhanced by the view that the stranger's actions are devoid of any meaningful value, and as such any endeavor to comprehend them is useless. In this case such a student is sure to find an explanation for their negative attitude to communication, which he may now consider a correct reaction to a superfluous communicative demand. Moreover, their growing anxiety justifies their biased interpretation of strangers' behavior, reinforcing their detachment from approaching unfamiliar values and lifestyles. Unsurprisingly, an ethnocentric apprehensive will do their best to abstain from situations that cause uncertainty and anxiety. For this reason they may not feel a need to study a foreign language at all, as they are convinced of Polish culture's superiority. Still, in the context of formal education in Poland, relative mastery of two foreign languages is required. Students are obliged to study them in spite of their unwillingness, which can be demonstrated by communication apprehensives. With their higher levels of ethnocentrism, apprehensives can invoke the imperative to keep Polish cultural heritage free from (English) contamination. Obviously, such an attitude cannot bring positive results as far as the long-term development of their FL skills is connected. Ethnocentric students who are afraid to communicate in L2 deprive themselves of chances for practicing their linguistic abilities in various contexts,

and in the end fall victims to their misinformed appraisals of the value of other cultures, people, and lifestyles. Therefore, they may never be able to appreciate the cultural diversity of ethnic groups, which is caused by their perceived lack of an effective tool for exchanging information and gaining knowledge (i.e., a FL skill).

Understandably, the destructive power of communication apprehension entwined with ethnocentrism constitutes a significant threat to one's readiness to enter into foreign language discourse in a volitional manner. It is also likely to endanger authentic communication between people from diverse language contexts. What is even worse, it may stigmatize and isolate individuals and societies, shrinking their advancement patterns, assuring stagnation, and enhancing adverse and hostile behaviors that can turn out to be dangerous for all.

6. Implications for the FL classroom

The results of this study highlight the importance of reducing students' anxiety and uncertainty in the FL classroom. It seems that one of the most important types of teacher interventions is to raise students' awareness of the foreign language culture, which may help them overcome ethnocentrism. Positive attitudes held towards other cultural groups are likely to lead ethnocentric individuals to appreciate cultural diversity of ethnic groups. This can be done by expanding FL knowledge by consciously reflecting on one's preconceptions about culture, stereotypes, and beliefs. Providing a variety of multicultural resources, materials and activities seems to offer a reliable tool for supporting students' cultural awareness. Among them, FL literature is a vast source of culturally appropriate materials – folktales, stories, or even pieces of poetry, not to mention films or other types of input found on the Internet.

Aside from addressing the needs of ethnocentric students, the weaknesses of communication apprehensives must be dealt with. These weaknesses are mostly connected to four problem areas: managing and controlling time, concentrating and remembering, managing test and evaluation situations, and lack of assertiveness and accepting responsibility. The teacher can help students to organize a study plan for the calendar year, and use teaching procedures that apply various channels of language processing (visual, auditory, tactile and kinetic). Most importantly, as anxious learners attribute failure to lack of abilities, constant refinement of FL skills is a necessary requirement for combating the anxiety evoked by one's preconceived beliefs about their inappropriate language skills mastery. From the point of view of the Polish cultural context, it seems that the primary teaching intervention should focus on creating more opportunities for learning and using the FL in and out of the classroom.

Teacher interventions can also comprise creating a less threatening atmosphere in the classroom to reduce anxiety. This can be done by establishing warm, genuine relationships with students. It is extremely important to inform students

about any possible expectations the teacher may have, and about the realistic development of the foreign language process.

The study is not free from limitations that should be addressed. First of all, the sample is quite homogeneous, comprising secondary grammar school students found in natural groups only, which might limit the generalizability of the results. Random sampling from people of different age, social economic status, and other demographics might render different results. The inclusion of the study of the phenomenon of intercultural communication sensitivity might as well have a serious explanatory power for understanding the relationship of communication apprehension and ethnocentrism. Finally, triangulating the data might generate more consistent results.

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