

# Only direct contact will help you understand Poland

**You deal with the issue of intercomprehension in the teaching of related languages – Polish and Ukrainian. Does intercomprehension also have a cultural dimension? What does it involve?**

My long-term experience (almost thirty years) in teaching indicates that it is the intercomprehensive approach that is one of the most effective tools for achieving a good command of Polish as a foreign language among Ukrainians, allowing the learners' attention to be focused on both the similarities and the differences between the related languages, Ukrainian and Polish, during classes. When I start teaching Polish to Ukrainians, I always ask them the following question, “In your opinion, which of the Slavic languages is Ukrainian most similar to?” Previously, the answer was often: “To the Russian language”. Now they say: “To Polish”. In fact, we have the most similarities at different language levels with Belarusian, although there are also quite a few similarities with Polish – 70%. The realisation that we already “know” 70% of the language we are learning triggers a positive attitude in students, they are more confident.

Intercomprehension in the teaching of related languages has primarily a linguistic dimension, but can also have a cultural dimension, e.g. similarities or differences in language culture, realised at the level of sociocultural knowledge. For communication in Polish to be effective, it is necessary to read the code of Polish spiritual and material culture, to find the most essential elements of the linguistic image of the world of Poles, to understand their verbal and non-verbal reactions to reality, i.e. for learners to have sociolinguistic knowledge, which



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manifests itself in perceiving the Polish language through the perspective of social and cultural contexts. Sociocultural knowledge is assimilated very quickly by Ukrainian students because its source in both languages is the vocabulary, which is a storage of information about the national verbal and non-verbal culture. An example of a successful positive transfer is the acquisition by Ukrainians of a vocabulary with powerful sociocultural potential. Such information is contained in the following semantic groups: formal and informal phrases in greetings, phrases of politeness or folk proverbs.

It is worth drawing the students' attention to the similarity of traditional informal signs in both cultures, above all the gestures used by Poles and Ukrainians to communicate: nodding the head, shaking hands, kissing on the cheeks, smiling, kissing the hand, high-fiving, etc. Having sociolinguistic knowledge will help the learner to feel at home when interacting with Polish people, as he or she will not only be able to read the message of his or her interlocutor's speech in the right way, but also information about his or her background, education, etc.

**In your opinion, what is the place of culture in language teaching? How does teaching culture affect the way or quality of acquiring knowledge about a foreign language?**

It is impossible to learn a foreign language, understand people using this language, without knowledge of culture – history, fiction, tradition, art, etc. The teacher's task is to emphasise the close relationship between culture and the language that expresses it in a verbal way. By introducing vocabulary characterised by cultural knowledge, e.g. proper names – first names, place names, names of important figures in the history of Poland, polite forms – at the very beginning of teaching Polish, we show learners how much they should learn in order to know how to use the language in appropriate situational contexts in order to feel comfortable communicating with Poles. As teachers, we encourage cooperation in creating a linguistic image of the world of Poles, using facts from the field of culture.

**What method of teaching cultural content do you find the most interesting and effective? What should special attention be paid to in the process of teaching culture in foreign language education?**

The introduction of cultural content by presenting polite forms, becoming familiar with phraseology, presentation of biographies of famous Poles, talking about historical events, Polish cuisine, traditions of celebrating

Christmas, etc., will certainly interest the learner, but it will be knowledge too little saturated with emotions, which will not provide a personal experience. That is why I encourage my students to get to know the “taste” of Polish culture by becoming, in a sense, a part of it – cooking Polish dishes, listening to Polish music, watching Polish films and series, talking to Poles. Only direct contact will help to understand Poland.

**How do you assess the knowledge of Polish culture among Ukrainians? Which issues would you describe as common/different places for the two cultures, and which as very distant but worth approaching?**

Ukrainians and Poles have so much in common in the field of linguistic, cultural, and historical space that the interest in Poland, Polish language, Poles among Ukrainians is very intense, and not only in recent years. In a sense, it is essential for knowing one's own identity. The names of famous Poles: Adam Mickiewicz, Nicolaus Copernicus, Frédéric Chopin, Marie Curie, Lech Wałęsa, Andrzej Sapkowski, Robert Lewandowski, etc. function both in the historical and contemporary space of Ukrainians. Recently, Ukrainians have become very interested in learning about Polish regional cultures – highlanders, Kashubians, their music, traditions.

**What are your observations on the interest in Polish culture among your students, young people? Which elements of Polish culture are the most attractive to them: history, traditions, or maybe contemporary film, contemporary literature?**

I work with students of Polish studies at the Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University in Lutsk with people who have independently decided to combine their lives with the Polish language. With a strong intrinsic motivation, young people want to reach a level of proficiency in Polish that allows them to understand what Poland is, what Poles are like. When students learn about the subsystems of the Polish language, they learn them through cultural facts: analysing socio-cultural phenomena, phraseologisms, onomastic space, translating journalistic and scientific texts, works of fine literature, etc. The courses "History and Culture of Poland" and "History of Polish Literature" are very popular among students. Thanks to the active cooperation of our university with the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Lutsk, our students participate as spectators or co-organisers in meetings with well-known Poles (Krzysztof Zanussi, Paweł Zalewski, Krzysztof Czyżewski, Jacek Dehnel, etc.), visit exhibitions, watch performances and films, are members of the Polish Club in Lutsk, “Pleograf” Discussion Film Club, travel a lot. The culture of everyday



life of Poles is also not foreign to our students, because they willingly take part in the Summer Schools for Teaching Polish Language and Culture, in the Erasmus+ program. As part of the "Double Diploma" programme, they study at Polish universities. Such direct contact with Polish culture is very effective. Students feel familiar with the language they are learning, they undergo intensive language practice, they understand both what Poles say and their motivations.

**You are involved in promoting Polish culture in Ukraine. Do you think that Gdańsk – due to its past, but also due to its contemporary character – can be seen as an important element of teaching Polish culture in the language education of foreigners?**

Gdańsk is a city combining historical, cultural, and linguistic space into a spiritual and material whole. It utilises the potential of past eras to preserve the identity of this region, which is intensively developing, changing, connecting people of different nationalities, allowing them to feel at home here. I am convinced that it is in Gdańsk that traditional and regional culture (e.g. Kashubian) can be fully experienced by visiting the city's monuments, listening to the organ in Oliwa Cathedral, taking part in street festivals, reading the works of local writers, enjoying Pomeranian cuisine, etc. In my opinion, a stay in Gdańsk will certainly accelerate and improve the process of learning Polish as a foreign language, because the material and spiritual culture of this city is a powerful source of knowledge necessary to understand the mentality of Poles.