Colloquium Area "The Role of Translation in Language and Literature Education"

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN FUTURE TRANSLATORS: INSIGHTS FROM A CASE STUDY



Inga STOIANOVA, Associate Professor, PhD
(Free International University of Moldova)

istoianova@ulim.md
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2413-3468

Received: January 8th, 2026 | Reviewed: January 8th, 2026 | Accepted: January 9th, 2026
UDC 81.19 | https://doi.org/10.62413/cqm.2026.40

Abstract

Translation is a type of intercultural communication interaction. Future translators' intercultural competence is formed in several dimensions, including familiarization with the studied language culture, assimilation of the foreign language behavioral model, and personal growth under the influence of two cultures. The goal of future translators' intercultural competence is to achieve a high level of linguistic identity that allows them to go beyond, without losing, their native culture, while acquiring the qualities of a cultural mediator. The development of future translators' intercultural competence contributes to the formation of specific professional knowledge and communicative skills.

Keywords: *intercultural communicative competence, cross-cultural communication, linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, knowledge, attitudes, awareness, skills*

In today's world, the importance of intercultural communication competence as an effective means of achieving a high level of cooperation between different peoples and cultures and maintaining friendly relations between representatives of various nations are impossible without knowledge of the language and respect for each other's cultures. As an integral component of culture, language performs a double-sided function: (1) a condition for the existence of culture, a specific mode of existence of culture, a factor in the formation of cultural codes, and (2) a product of culture. Despite the clear necessity of this dual linguistic and cultural mastery in professional practice, the specific pedagogical methods used to cultivate these skills remain under-examined in certain academic contexts.

This study was prompted by a significant gap in existing studies regarding the development of intercultural communicative competences (ICC) among transla-

tion students in Moldova's higher education system. Hence, the study aims to assess the current ICC levels of future translators and analyze how these competencies evolve or vary across different years of their degree program.

Literature review

The study is based on the notion that communication and culture are essentially inextricable in function. According to Porter and Samovar, "culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks with whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meaning they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted" (Porter & Samovar, 1988, p. 20).

The term *intercultural communication* embodies a multitude of concepts that broadly imply communication between representatives of different cultures, regardless of the area in which they communicate. According to a definition provided by Lustig and Koester, "intercultural communication is a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people from different cultures create shared meanings" (Lustig & Koester, 2007, p. 46). Another reason behind the scene is that all the subtleties and the depth of the problems of interlingual and intercultural communication become especially evident, and sometimes simply conscious, when comparing foreign languages and cultures with the native one. To support this idea, Osland, Jacqueline Chara-Lisa mentions, "the degree to which cultures are similar or dissimilar affects the interpretation of symbols in an intercultural encounter and may lead to misunderstanding and breakdown in communication" (Osland, 2022, p. 15).

In the case of translators as intercultural mediators, it is the balance between the similar and the different in the perceptual processes of the source and target language interlocutors through the translator's interpretation. The intercultural mediation of the translator or interpreter consists of overcoming cultural distance, preventing intercultural conflicts, achieving reciprocal understanding between the subjects of intercultural communication, and transmitting culturally specific information. Therefore, acquiring intercultural competence allows students in translation to feel almost on an equal footing with native speakers (in terms of culture), which is a step toward adequate knowledge of a foreign language. The final stage of intercultural competence will be the ability of students to operate with the necessary cultural and language awareness and adapt their linguistic conduct to behaviors that adequately or closely correspond to those of native speakers. In addition, mastering the skills of communicative interaction is considered an indicator of the high level of professional training and development of specialists in translation (Bakanova, 2008).

Michael Byram, the leading figure in the field of ICC, stipulates, "the capacity to engage with people of a cultural group and identity to which we do not belong, to understand them and to act together with them; it is not a matter [...] of crossing group boundaries to see their culture from within, and to see our own culture from the other perspective" (Byram,2012, p. 7). As for Deardorff, ICC is regarded

as "the awareness, valuing, and understanding of cultural difference, experiencing other cultures and self-awareness of one's own culture" (Deardorff, 2006, p. 247). Referring to ICC for translators, Katan highlights their aptitude to handle the difference: "intercultural competence means being able to perceive and handle difference" (Katan, 2009, p. 284). Comparing the aforementioned definitions, the key words met, almost explicitly and implicitly, are "other/difference" which in translation studies might refer to both cultural and linguistic issues. It is appropriate to recall the European Union motto "Unity in diversity," adopted in 2000 and signifying "how Europeans have come together, in the form of the EU, to work for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continent's many different cultures, traditions, and languages" (European Union).

Having discussed the defining notions of ICC, let us consider the characteristics proper to ICC. In his impressive research into the ICC typology and models' constituents, Michael Byram suggested a model consisting of five components (Figure 1).

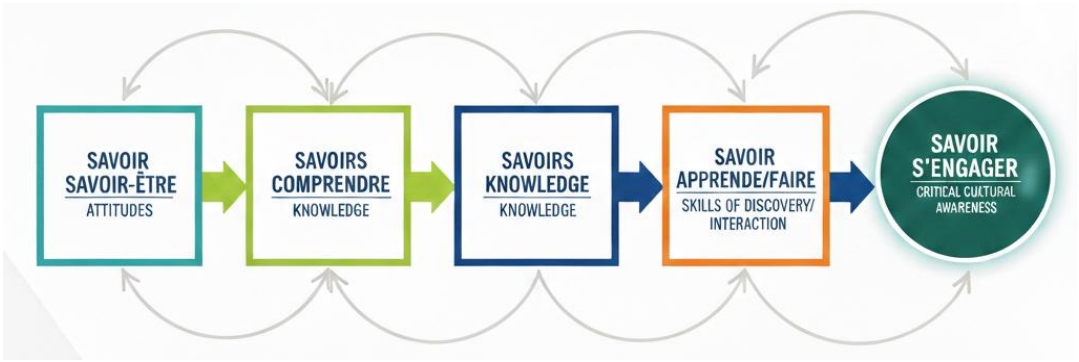


Figure 1. *Michael Byram's Five Savoir of ICC*

The first refers to an individual's attitude (*savoir-être*), which deals with adjusting our viewpoint and regard for others, maintaining curiosity and an open mind, contesting our belief in our own culture, and being sceptical of other cultural backgrounds. The second component includes skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir-comprendre*), referring to the ability to render various historical and cultural realia, to realize how to explain them, and to link them to cultural concepts from one's own culture (e.g., translation of cultural realia may refer to the Romanian *dor, mămăligă, acasă, mărţişor,* etc.; Russian *щи, буржуйка, тоска, авось, почемучка*, etc.), which do not have direct equivalents in the target languages and require descriptive translation, at least. The third component of ICC is knowledge (*savoir*) and refers to awareness of one's social group's customs and beliefs, as well as the speaker's knowledge of group and individual interaction processes. The fourth component embraces interaction skills (*savoir-apprendre*), which refer to knowledge of cultural traditions and the ability to put that information to use in a communicative situation (e.g., the color of the clothes the interpreter wears during the interpretation act culturally matters, as white in Western cultures is the color of purity and peace, while in Eastern and Asian cultures it represents death and unhappiness). The last, fifth, component of ICC is critical cultural awareness (*savoir*

s'engager), relating to the evaluation of one's own and other cultures activities and products from multiple criteria; e.g., the ways of greeting, proxemics/personal space, haptic habits, and kinesics (body movement and gestures) may change depending on the culture (Byram, 1997; Byram, 2012).

On applying Byram's typology of ICC to trainee translators, it is important to mention that within the translation process, the task of the translator is not only to find equivalent correspondences to convey the communicative attitude of the sender but also to provide the recipient with the necessary explanations when intercultural differences hinder the correct perception of the goals of communication. Furthermore, the principal findings of the current investigation on the assessment of ICC levels in trainee translators will be shared.

Methodology

To investigate the ICC in trainee translators, we conducted an online survey that lasted from December 2024 to January 2025, the period during which the students enjoyed winter holidays and were available to answer the questionnaire items. The participants were students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages, Bachelor's Degree, three years of study, at the Free International University of Moldova and Moldova State University. All of the respondents spoke Romanian and Russian as their mother tongues and studied English as their first foreign language. In the sample, 51 undergraduate students successfully completed the survey on a voluntary basis. Among them, 90% were female undergraduate students, and 10% were male, all of the same age (19-23 years old); the majority of undergraduate students in the specialty "Translation and Interpretation" are female. The most active participants were second and third-year students (38.7% each), followed by first-year students (22.6%). The many respondents had a certain degree of experience in translating/interpreting within a non-official environment, including everyday communication with native speakers of other languages, volunteering, etc. According to information from the Faculty's office, half of the third-year students are officially part-time engaged in NGOs and representations of international organizations in Moldova (Red Cross, Action against Hunger), etc. Therefore, their theoretical and practical background in the translation/interpretation process, as well as their intercultural competencies, may serve as a foundation for the survey results.

The adapted Byram's and Lei's model of Intercultural Communicative Competence was used as the instrument in this study; it included 50 items, the content of which was modified according to the aspects of the translation/interpretation process (Lei, 2021, pp. 46-47). The questionnaire had a closed structure (the respondents chose an answer from a certain number of options) and was self-administered. The questionnaire included eight dimensions assessed according to a five-point scale. The questions asked participants to rate how strongly they agreed with each statement (1– strongly disagree, 5 - strongly agree). To identify the intercultural competence of trainee translators, the following aspects were involved: communicative competence, comprising linguistic, sociolinguistic, dis-

course, and strategic competencies, as well as intercultural competence, embracing intercultural knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills.

The data having been collected, the results were introduced into statistical software to arrange the data and rescore the reversed items. To determine the overall reliability of the scale, Cronbach's Alpha was used. It showed 0.85 for the instrument, which signified a logical and organized consistency of the questionnaire.

In the present analysis of the ICC in trainee translators, Sahin's adapted scale, the mean scores were applied according to the following norms: low level score - below 2.5; acceptable score level- between 2.5 and 2.99; moderate level- 3 to 3.5; high level score embraces the range 3. 5 to 3.99. If the mean score is above 4.0, the level of ICC is very high. The higher the mean score is, the higher the level of ICC is (Sahin, 2020, p. 147).

Results and Discussion

The results of the survey analysis on ICC according to the eight dimensions are shown in Table 1. The overall level of ICC in trainee translators is high, regardless of the year of study (M = 3.63). The data shows that the highest mean value in trainee translators refers to attitude (D6 – M = 4.15), followed by awareness (D7 – M = 4.08). The levels of other ICC items, such as discourse competence (D3-M = 3.65), sociolinguistic competence (D2 - M = 3.56), and skills (D8 - M=3.56), are also high. As for the competences that scored at a moderate level, strategic competence (D4 - M = 3.43), knowledge (D5 - M = 3.39), and linguistic competence (D1- M = 3.26) should be revealed. Therefore, five out of eight dimensions of ICC (62.5%) obtained very high and high scores, while three dimensions out of eight (37.5%) acquired moderate scores.

Dimension	ICC Dimension	Average
D 1	Linguistic competence	3.26
D 2	Sociolinguistic competence	3.56
D 3	Discourse competence	3,65
D 4	Strategic competence	3.43
D 5	Knowledge	3.39
D 6	Attitudes	4.15
D 7	Awareness	4.08
D 8	Skills	3.56
	Total	**3.63**

Table 1. *Overview of the Trainee Translators' ICC*

Further, a closer comparative inspection at the ratio average scores is performed to find out the variability of overall ICC mean scores according to the year of study.

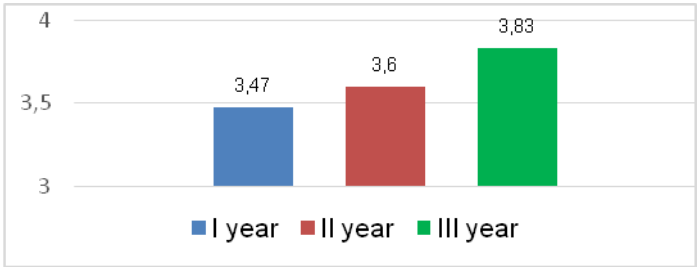


Figure 2. *Ratio of mean scores of ICC in trainee translators (per year of study)*

As shown in Figure 2, there is a constant growth in the overall average scores: 3.47 for the first-year students, 3.6 for the second-year students, and 3.83 for the third-year students. The difference in the overall score between the first and 2nd-year students is 0.16, whereas the difference between the second and 3rd-year students is 0.23.

The following stage is supposed to accomplish a comparative analysis of the ICC components per year of study, according to the communicative and intercultural categorization (see Figures 4 and 5).

The basis of *linguistic competence* is defined as "the ability to master language knowledge and the use of language skills" (Wen, 1990, p. 14). It refers to acquiring phonetic, lexical, and grammatical awareness based on the four language skills, emphasized in the first year of study when future translators study practical courses aimed at establishing and developing reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. The mean varies from a moderate score of 3.03 (1st year) up to an upper moderate mean score of 3.4 (3rd year).

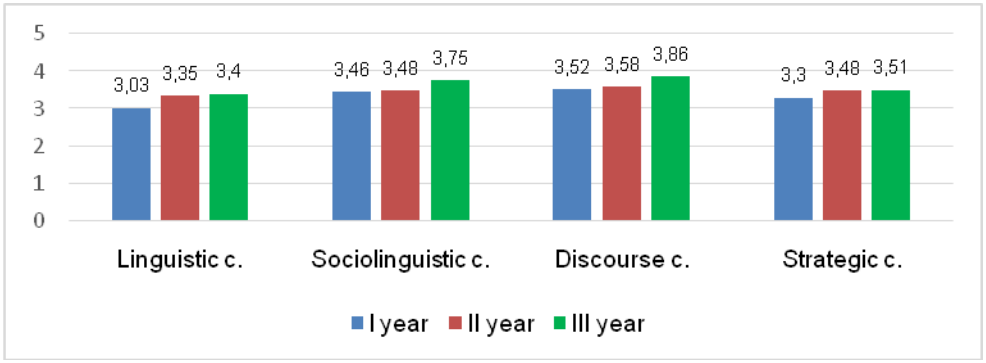


Figure 4. *Ratio of communicative competences in trainee translators*

As for *sociolinguistic competence*, it refers to the capacity to modify one's speech to suit the social context; without it, even grammatically correct statements may communicate meanings that are completely in disagreement with the intended message of the speaker. The results show the almost identical upper moderate mean scores in the 1st and 2nd years (M = 3.46/3.48) with a definite difference for the 3rd year students (M = 3.75). Sociolinguistic competence in translators encompasses knowledge of the linguistic picture of the world; knowledge of the components of a communicative situation and the ability to organize one's speech behav-

ior in accordance with them; possession of language variability, the ability to detect language and speech differences among representatives of different social strata and groups; and the ability to use socially marked linguistic means, depending on the social situation, etc. (Byram, 1997).

A similar situation is found within the *discourse competence*, referring to "the ability to organize utterances into cohesive, coherent, and complete discourse" (Wen, 1990, p. 15). Though all the samples attest to a high level of competence, the 3rd year students' mean score is much higher (M = 3.86) compared to the first two years' students (M = 3.52/3.58). For a translator, a high level of discourse competence involves knowledge of the main genres of special discourse, knowledge of the communicative goal, and the patterns and features of their construction both in source and target languages, taking into account the author's intention and a certain communicative situation; the ability to build a logical sequence of presenting the sender's thoughts in the TL, etc.

As for *strategic competence*, there are moderate mean scores for the 1st year (M = 3.30) and the 2nd year (M = 3.48), and a high score for the 3rd year students (M = 3.51), though the difference between the intermediate and the terminal years is not essential. Strategic sub-competence implies that the translator must be able to plan and implement a translation act using the most appropriate strategy, method, or technique and justify its usage; to assess the translation process and intermediate stages to achieve the ultimate goal of translation; to identify translation problems and challenges, and find ways to solve them.

Intercultural knowledge competence is defined as "knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (Byram, 1997, p. 37). Viewed in the context of intercultural communication, the translation process is a form of interaction between national cultures. In fact, intercultural communication always involves interpersonal communication in a context where the cultural differences of its participants are revealed, and culturally different signs and symbols are interpreted as variances in the verbal and non-verbal codes in a certain cultural communicative context. The translation of culture-bound units/ realia, idioms, allusions, slang, and jargon, as well as jokes, is used to illustrate the idea, where a direct translation is almost impossible due to the lack of a direct equivalent of cultural realia in the target language. The translator renders by any means the specific cultural coloring of the translated linguistic phenomena.

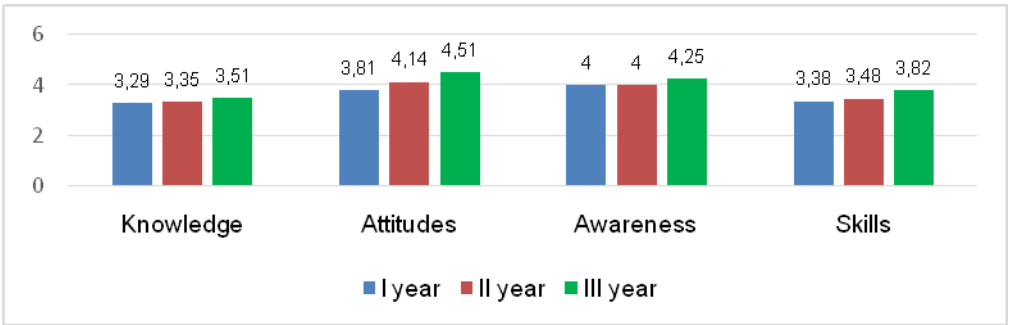


Figure 5. *Ratio of intercultural competences in trainee translators*

The results of the sample revealed moderate mean scores in the 1st and 2nd year students (M = 3.29/3.35) compared to a high mean score (M = 3.51) in the 3rd year students due to the successful study of the discipline contributing to the development of their cultural background.

With respect to *attitude* as a component of ICC, the survey data exposed a high mean score in the 1st year students (M = 3.81) and a very high mean score in the 2nd and 3rd year students (M = 4.14/4.51) due to the successful study of the disciplines that contribute to the development of their cultural background. When mentioning attitude, Byram referred to "willingness and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" (Byram, 1997, pp. 57-58). The desire to engage with and understand other cultures is characterized by open-minded curiosity, an appreciation of different perspectives, and a willingness to experiment with new ways of living and communicating. This can encompass a keen interest in learning about the customs and traditions of other cultures, as well as an openness to adapting to new social norms and practices, all of which are vital for future translators.

In Michael Byram's framework, *critical cultural awareness* is the most sophisticated and central component. Byram defines it as "an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 1997, p. 53). It ensures that a person does not just "mimic" another culture but understands the "why" behind cultural differences. Here, the translator always faces the problem of perception and processing someone else's "mental cultural content", since in the translated text they do not present their own ideas and values but verbalize only the thoughts formulated by the source language interlocutor. Acting as a mediator who helps convey the aspects and essence of the source culture to the target culture, they should help bridge the gap between two unknown cultures and provide a passage that will allow the target readers to comprehend and appreciate the source culture as best as possible. As Figure 5 shows, there are shared very high mean scores for all three years of study, with identical data for the 1st and 2nd year students (M = 4.0) and an increase in the 3rd year students (M = 4.25), which means that trainee translators are particularly sensitive to various cultures and take a serious attitude towards cultural differences.

Skills, as the last component of ICC in Byram's typology, are referred to as "skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it, and relate it to documents from one's own" (Byram, 1997, p. 52). The results of the sample display moderate mean scores for the 1st and 2nd year students (M = 3.38/3.48), contrasting with the high score for the 3rd year students (M = 3.82). The reason is that the 3rd year students already studied almost all the disciplines that are part of the training program and acquired the theoretical, practical, and research competencies stipulated in the curricula. The design of the training program in "Translation and Interpretation" includes two years of intensive practical and theoretical learning of the first and second languages in both synchronic (grammar, vocabulary, literature, discourse analysis, etc.) and diachronic

(studied foreign language culture and civilization, history) dimensions. Consequently, the 3rd year study plan is primarily focused on the development of translational skills within the courses of literary and specialized translation, consecutive and simultaneous interpretation, business correspondence, etc., contributing to the formation of translational and interpretative skills in students.

Therefore, the data, when viewed in their entirety, confirm that the development of intercultural competence is a cyclical and developmental process where attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness develop in a cyclical (or spiral) manner, interact, and develop together rather than in isolation.

Conclusion

The development of Intercultural Communicative Competence follows the spiral syllabus model as linguistic accuracy is integrated over time with discourse organization, pragmatics, and strategic use of language. Still, linguistic competency alone is not sufficient for success. The results of the investigation confirm that ICC develops from academic and practical training. Systematic development of ICC should be an essential goal of translator training. Cultural, pragmatic, and applied course formats are significant contributors to the development of students' abilities to be successful intercultural mediators. Translator education must have a strong emphasis on intercultural mediation, pragmatic awareness and skills, and critically examining one's own culture to ensure the competencies necessary for professional practice. This suggests that ICC should be considered a core/ longitudinally assessed learning objective, and not a secondary consideration, in translator education, mapped onto internationally recognized models of ICC.

References

Баканова, Ю. В. (2008). Развитие межкультурной компетенции. Будущих лингвистов-переводчиков. *Вестник ВГУ, Серия: лингвистика и межкультурная коммуникация*, 2, 116-120 / Bakanova, I. V. (2008). Razvitie mezhkul'turnoj kompetencii budushchih lingvistov-perevodchikov. *Vestnik VGU, Seriya: Lingvistika i Mezhkul'turnaya Kommunikaciya*, 2, 116–120.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (2012). *Intercultural competence for all: Preparation for adulthood in a diverse world*. Council of Europe Publishing.

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002.

European Union. (n.d.). *The EU Motto*. https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/symbols/eu-motto_en.

Katan, D. (2009). Translator training and intercultural competence. In S. Cavagnoli, E. Di Giovanni, R. Merlini (Eds.). *La ricerca nella comunicazione interlinguistica: Modelli teorici e metodologici* (pp. 282–301). Franco Angeli.

Lei, W. (2021). A survey on preservice English teachers' intercultural communicative competence in China. *English Language Teaching*, 14(1), 37–47. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v14n1p37.

Lustig, M. W., Koester, J. (2007). *Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures* (5th edition). Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Osland, J. C. (2002). *Translation as intercultural communication: A case study* [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Calgary. http://hdl.handle.net/1880/41326.

Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., Jain, N. C. (1988). *Understanding intercultural communication*. Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Sevimel-Sahin, A. (2020). A survey on the intercultural communicative competence of ELT undergraduate students. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6(2), 141–153. https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.775799.

Wen, Q. F. (1990). *Oral English testing and teaching*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.