Session Plan: Comparing cultural values using Hofstede

Learning outcomes

Theoretical dimension – sub-dimension 2 – 'Conceptual tools for analysing intercultural perspectives (e.g. frameworks for cultural comparison)'

Stage (I, II, III)

I (if students have no knowledge of Hofstede or similar theorists). II or III (if students have prior knowledge – if they do an alternative theorist like Shalom Schwartz could be used and more emphasis placed on theorists like Jones and McSweeney who are critical of Hofstede)

Preparation needed

None actually needed apart from ensuring there is a functioning computer with internet access and projector and that students have access to the student worksheet (see below).

Students could, however, be asked prior to the session to access the site -

www.geert-hofstede.com (using any browser apart from internet explorer which doesn't give full functionality!)

to familiarize themselves with his six dimensions and to print off a comparison graph for any two countries they are familiar with. This can also be done as a follow-up activity to the session (see below)

Groups

Where possible students should work in groups of 3 or 4 with each student being of a different nationality or with each student having a different second language. Wherever the context doesn't permit this groups should be created which maximize diversity of linguistic or cultural knowledge or knowledge of other countries. Some staff may prefer starting with pairs and then moving to larger groups.

Time (total suggested time)

60 minutes

Background for lecturer

For stage I - familiarity not just with Hofstede's website but with his seminal –

- Hoftede, Geert (2005) <u>Cultures And Organizations: Software of the Mind</u>. New-York: McGraw-Hill

and also with critiques of his methodology – e.g.

- Jones, M.L. (2007) 'Hofstede – Culturally Questionable?' Available at Research Online - http://ro.uow.edu.au/commpapers/370

For stages II or III – familiarity also with

- Schwartz, Shalom H. et al. 'Value Priorities and Social Desirability:Much Substance, Some Style' *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 36 (1997), 7.

- McSweeney, Brendan 'Hofstede's Model of National Cultural Differences and their Consequences: A Triumph of Faith – a Failure of Analysis' published in *Human Relations*, Vol 55, No.1, January 2002, pp.89-118

- Hofstede, Geert   'Dimensions Do Not Exist: a reply to Brendan McSweeney' available at http://www.geert-hofstede.com/dimBSGH.pdf

Activities

a.i. Tutor introduces Hofstede, his dimensions and methodology via his website (address given above) (10 minutes)

a.ii. Students given time to read online or on paper Hofstede's summaries of his dimensions (5 minutes)

a.iii. Students put into culturally diverse groups to work on activity on student sheet (see below) (20 minutes)

a.iv. Each group shares the outcomes of their discussions with the whole group – this should allow the whole group to see how different countries 'measure up' against Hofstede's dimensions (5 minutes)

a.v. Students return to their small groups and ask themselves if they have found using the dimensions useful in helping them understand other cultures and their own. They should also ask if they see any dangers (e.g. essentialism/over-generalisation) in his methodology (10 minutes)

a.vi. Whole group discussion on the value of Hofstede's dimensions and methodology (10 minutes)

a.vii. Follow-up activity. Students out of class to use website to generate and print off graphs comparing two countries they know well for discussion in next session. They should also read Jones (reference above) in preparation for deeper discussion of Hofstede's reliability.

a.viii. If the tutor then wishes to work with activity 2 on the student worksheet they may need to provide *more concrete examples* than are given in the written instructions.

Adaptations for an integrated approach

Creating inititial familiarity with Hofstede and his methodology does not necessarily need a lot of time especially as the material is easy for students to follow up independently. This makes it relatively easy to insert a session of this kind into a variety of forms of translation module not explicitly focusing on intercultural issues.

In order to make Hofstede directly relevant to the challenges the translator can face, it may be worthwhile asking students to reflect (and think of examples) of how differences in, for example, Power Distance Index or Individualism/Collectivism are mirrored in linguistic differences. This often generates instances of non-equivalence posing challenges for the translator.

At the same time these activities are **not** intended to teach the textual or interpersonal dimensions of the curriculum framework but only the theoretical one (see 'learning outcomes' above). As a result the second activity on the worksheet involves beginning to **sensitise** students to possible applications of the relevant theory within the translation profession (in text production or in professional social interaction). It does not involve an attempt to actually teach the application of theory to these contexts.

COMPARING CULTURAL VALUES

A number of important intercultural theorists (e.g. Hofstede, Schwartz) have suggested areas of life in which we can systematically compare the values commonly present in different societies (i.e. *what is treated as important in those societies, what is respected*). These areas of life are referred to by some theorists as 'dimensions'. Some of the dimensions they think it useful to compare are presented below in the left-hand column.

1. *Work together to compare the attitudes of societies you know well towards these four dimensions (taken from Hofstede). Discuss and then summarise in the boxes provided -*

Dimension	*Areas to consider and questions to ask about each culture*	*Society 1*	*Society 2*
Power distance	Who has authority? What type of authority? How much power do they have? (eg. parents, teachers, police, government)		
Individualism versus collectivism	Are families small or large? Do people tend to make decisions alone or as a group? Does the extended family play a large role in people's lives?		

Dimension	Areas to consider and questions to ask about each culture	Society 1	Society 2
Masculinity versus femininity	Does the society tend to value achievement and assertiveness? How competitive is it? Or does it tend to value co-operation, modesty and non-material things?		
Indulgence versus restraint	Is self-control and not needing to seek 'pleasure' valued? Does the society expect pe ople to be able to 'let go'? How should work and play be balanced?		

2(a)

Can you think of examples of areas where cultural differences concerning these dimensions could affect your working relationships with fellow translators or clients?

Example - when working in an in-house team of translators some colleagues may, for cultural reasons, prefer working more collectively and others more individually

2(b)

Can you think of examples of areas where cultural differences concerning these dimensions are mirrored in differences of language which can create challenges when translating texts?

Example - societies with a higher power distance may have a whole range of forms of politeness register indicating respect in the language they use? The language used in a society with lower power distance may have far fewer forms of politeness register creating problems of equivalence for the translator