

Intercultural Communication in Teaching Foreign Languages

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Annotation: The article discusses the meaning and importance of intercultural communication in EFL classes. It also reveals the challenges in teaching a foreign language and provides suggestions on how to develop intercultural competence of learners.

Key words: communicative competence, intercultural competence, shared code, socio-cultural conflicts.

Changes occurring in a modern social space exert considerable influence on content and direction of communicative processes. It is related not only to extensive opportunities of receiving and processing information, but also to new forms of communication.

At present, one of the most progressively developing directions is intercultural communication. Process of globalization has made linguists, philologists and educators pay special attention to such an aspect of communication as interaction in the intercultural environment and teaching foreign languages. It is worth mentioning that they have a close connection with each other.

Teaching foreign languages is now experiencing difficult period of reconsidering methodology and methods. This has been caused by the substantial changes in respect of this discipline. Nowadays, specialists in the sphere of science and technology are in great need of teaching foreign language not as an end in itself, but as a tool of production.

S. Ter-Minasova supposes that every lesson of foreign language is the cross of cultures, the practice of intercultural communication. This can be explained by the fact that each foreign word reflects a foreign world and a foreign culture. That is, behind every word is the world view that is stipulated by national consciousness. [1]

The main task of teaching foreign languages now is teaching a foreign language as a real and a fully-fledged means of communication.

Traditional way of teaching foreign languages frequently as we know boils down to reading special texts. As a result of this type of teaching almost solely one function of the word is realized. The function of communication, that is, information is realized out of four communicative skills of learning a language (reading, writing, speaking, and listening); only reading is developed as passive and oriented at “learning”. Teaching foreign languages based only on written texts turns communicative opportunities of language into passive ability to understand texts composed by others. However, it tends neither to create nor to produce speech, which is an essential part of language learning process. It is caused by the fact that without speech, real communication is impossible.

In order to teach a foreign language as a means of communication, it is important to create real speaking environment and set a connection between teaching foreign languages and life. In addition, using foreign languages actively in live and natural situations greatly contributes to successful teaching.

From our own practice of teaching, we know those real situations might be scientific discussions in a target language (with the presence of a native speaker or without him/her), annotation, abstracting and discussion of foreign scientific literature. Besides, reading lecture course books, attending practical lessons on specialty in a foreign language increases learners’ chances to be exposed to the real world. Higher school students may take advantage of participating in international conferences (as speakers, interpreters, who need to be able to communicate, contact, understand and deliver message), as well as take use of participating in foreign language groups, where students of different fields may gather.

The challenges facing the teachers of foreign language emerge from ultimate development of communicative skills and ability. In solving this problem, it is absolutely essential to consider doing the tasks such as investigating and applying new methods and methodics of teaching, employing electronic dictionaries and other possible Internet resources for teaching a language and using multimedia for introducing study materials. The new methods are expected to develop all basic types of acquiring a language by using computers, multimedia and Internet technology, which grant text files, language games and all the possible varieties of training.

However, we think that the most important thing lies in the fact that “languages must be taught in indissoluble unity with the world and culture of nations speaking in the target language. [1]

As we all know, culture has a communicative value, that is to say, it is considered to be the form of communication among people. According to the modern approach in this field, intercultural communication presupposes the difference in using one language, and requires awareness of inseparable unity with the culture of nations whose language is being learnt. It also puts the sign of equality between cultural literacy and applied knowledge.

Consciousness of one’s own culture may happen in the exercise of direct contacts with norms of other countries during the journey and within one’s own country (international and domestic imperative) [2]. In conditions of global networks, those contacts emerge far more frequently. In intercultural communication, “all vital and central problems of communication, in particular, the problems of contextualization and (re)construction of meaning in the frame of communicative events” become apparent in a vivid way [3].

Undoubtedly, telecommunications technology and Internet has a very strong influence on culture in the modern world. It is worth mentioning that in informational communicative environment intercultural communication carries symbolic character to a great extent, since the process of exchanging information (symbols) happens in the form of words, actions and several objects (photographs, graphics, tables, audio files and etc.). They are interpreted this or that way by the people who belong to various language cultures. These distinctions in understanding connected with variations in dictionary words, grammars, conceptions of time, showing respect and social hierarchy as well as other distinctions in language cultures.

Thus with the development of the Internet and its entry into the global networking educational space the problem of overcoming language barrier gains even greater value. The representatives of different cultures utilize diverse models of perceiving the reality by means of symbolic systems. This in turn is reflected in the used language constructions and in the styles of oral and written communications.

There is no doubt that the study of intercultural interactions promotes the development of researches that are aimed at increasing the effect of communication and the improvement of intercultural communication skills and at

forming language personality, which can adequately perceive and interpret cross-cultural competence during the communication process.

Learning the world of native speakers is targeted to help understand the features of context usage of words, additional shades of meanings, political, cultural, historical and other connotations of language and speech unit.

It is important to mention that particular attention has been given to realias, since it is quite important to know realias deeply. It leads to the correct understanding of events and facts that are related to everyday life of the people who speak the target language.

At the heart of any communication, that is, at the heart of spoken communication as such, lies “shared code”, mutual knowledge of realias and knowledge of the subject of communication between the participants of the communication: speaker/writer and listener/reader.

All discrepancies between languages and cultures are revealed when they are compared. However, at the level of the linguistic picture of the world, these differences are not visible, and the words of different languages look outwardly the same. Here are hidden pitfalls in the practice of teaching foreign languages. Attention should be paid to the fact that such difficulties are revealed only in a comparative analysis of at least two languages (and accordingly the cultures) – foreign and native. Thus, they represent certain difficulties in the practice of teaching foreign languages that teachers – speakers of a foreign language who do not know the students’ native language – are not able to see.

Learning a foreign language enriches such aspects of social existence as a culture of thinking, scholarship, world perception and attitude, skills in empathy and tolerance, respect for other cultural traditions, self-esteem and ability to respect other nations. Owning a foreign language and understanding it is not the same. In foreign language communication, it is important to know not only the language code of another language and the rules for its use, but also to take into account norms of social behavior, national-cultural traditions and habits inherent in other people. Ignorance of these spheres can lead to discord of intercultural interaction and negatively affect the tonality and results of communication, since no situation, no event is perceived by a person without emotion. Communication and behavior are always evaluated in terms of cultural norms and values adopted in the native society. Ignoring intercultural differences leads to socio-cultural conflicts. Needless to say that in the process of communication in intercultural situations,

even if its participants possess a common linguistic code, there are inherent conflicts between knowledge and ignorance, between readiness to understand and prejudice. In this regard, modern educational programs for teaching a foreign language should be aimed at resolving these conflicts, that is, developing students' ability to create and perceive foreign-language communicative constructions in accordance with the given communication situation, speech purpose and communicative intention. For true achievement of this task it is important to develop speech and cultural experience. Intercultural communication of representatives of different cultures is of great importance. In accordance with the rules of intercultural communication, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that in the process of learning a foreign language it is important: to expand the individual picture of the world by understanding the language picture of the world of the speakers of the language being studied; acquire socio-cultural knowledge; to join and accept other people's lifestyle / behavior. The success of learning intercultural communication depends mostly on the materials used in the classroom (interesting facts about life in the countries of the target language, the understanding of the texts, the availability of photographs, pictures, diagrams, drawings, comments, etc.). It is obvious that the absence of a language barrier does not provide for overcoming the cultural barrier. An intercultural approach to teaching a foreign language helps students to become familiar with the culture, traditions and customs of the country of the target language, which, in turn, will allow them to communicate with native speakers at an appropriate level. In other words, teaching a foreign language as a means of communication should not only develop foreign language communicative abilities, but also familiarize students with the socio-cultural picture of the world of the language being studied.

Thus, the linguistic phenomena reflect the facts of social life of a given speaking group.

It is worth noting that the main tasks of teaching a foreign language as a means of communication are inextricably merged with the tasks of studying the social and cultural life of countries and peoples speaking this language.

According to S. G. Ter-Minasova, "knowing the meanings and rules of grammar is clearly insufficient to actively use language as a means of communication. You need to know as much as possible the world of the language you are learning. In addition to the meanings and rules of grammar, you need to know: 1) when to say / write how, to whom, with whom, where; 2) how a given

meaning / concept, the given object of thought lives in the reality of the language being studied" [1]. Thus, mastering a foreign language code that allows successful intercultural interaction proposes the study of cultural features that determine the specifics of social and business behavior of a partner. That behavior is affected by the influence of historical traditions, customs, lifestyle and etc. Therefore, foreign languages as a means of communication between representatives of different nations and cultures should be studied in the indissoluble unity with the world and the culture of the peoples speaking these languages.

In the attempt to develop students' intercultural competence, the following approaches can be suggested:

- 21st century is the era of technology that opens its doors to worldwide communication. This makes it possible for students to take every chance to exchange their ideas and practice their knowledge by talking to native speakers;

- Another point to make here can be virtual libraries which are available on the Internet widely. That means that students can get a wide range of books published in various countries including English speaking regions such as England, the United States, New Zealand, Canada and others. Students can analyze other materials by comparing their own world perception with those in the books;

- It is known that learning a foreign language incorporates different aspects of language learning. They are grammatical knowledge, proficiency, fluency and communicative competence, which develop people's awareness of other cultures on a subconscious level. That way, students will be able to advance their recognition of other cultures, beliefs, customs and everyday life.

- People tend to presume that one of the foremost approaches for improving intercultural awareness is to establish consciousness of the values and the significance of cultural heritage in both learner's own culture and the culture of the target language speakers. In other words, in an attempt to expand multicultural understanding, each learner should connect his/her custom to a new language ritual.

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