
DEVELOPING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AWARENESS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Nowadays we are witnessing global changes in the political life as well as in the economy. These changes have one more time underlined the utter importance of foreign language teaching (here and further — FLT) for the development of an all-round personality. V.A. Grebennikova has very rightly put it that “foreign languages and foreign language teaching channel humanitarian knowledge and, broader, humanity; FLT acts as a kind of filter against both Western and Eastern mass-culture, leaving what matches the target culture intact, thus underlining and emphasizing its merits”. This important aspect added a new dimension to FLT in modern Russia, making foreign languages not just an ordinary subject but a tool for efficient cross-cultural and international communication (V.V. Safonova).

The sociocultural approach which now dominates the educational environment has among its strategic values the formation of cultural awareness, i.e. the idea worldview specific to the speaker of the foreign language. So FLT cannot be any longer be limited to teaching language structures and the rules of their usage.

The essence of sociocultural approach is in teaching foreign languages as a means of cross-cultural communication and a way to understand foreign cultures and subcultures. “Sociocultural approach makes it possible to make the learner aware of the world history, the learner’s own country and nation, and to make him understand that all the people in the world are interconnected, and only their joint effort can make the solution of global problems possible...” (V.V. Safonova).

The efficiency of sociocultural education via FLT can only be guaranteed when the dialogue between cultures and civilizations is balanced.

Key words: foreign language education, teaching, foreign languages, sociocultural approach, culture, civilization, cross-cultural communication

“The most important means of human communication is a natural human language, as it is the language, the most complex and enigmatic system that made us the species we are — homo sapience. Language, being both an eternal and infinite subject of scientific inquiry has recently began to attract attention of scientists working in cognitive studies, communication and anthropocentric research, i.e. focusing on such systems as ‘human — language — culture — communication’. Being by definition interdisciplinary, such approaches require a sound knowledge of psychology, philosophy, pedagogy, history and culture studies, thus allowing to observe new aspects of intra- and cross-cultural communication, with the latter being the most challenging of all” [7. P. 10].

The ongoing change of global political and economic landscape, as well as switches of education philosophies have once again highlighted the importance of foreign languages as a means of holistic cultural education. As V.A. Grebenshchikova rightly puts it “foreign languages and foreign language teaching are a second source of genuine universal humanistic culture; it is a sort of mesh which filters out elements of mass and consumerculture of the West and East, leaving only those elements which seamlessly integrate with the national culture, enhancing it and highlighting its best features “ [1. P. 108]. They have made a significant impact on the whole system of foreign language

teaching and, quote, “set new goals for FLT in this country, giving it a new status of subjects which should be taught in accordance with the best international practices of FLT and with consideration of current Russian cultural context” [4. P. 3].

A new strategic task of the FLT in Russia is to “develop cross-cultural awareness and thus focus on teaching communicative, social and cultural competences”. This implies that in the current FLT climate we have to go beyond teaching just the verbal code and developing the skills of using it. We have to create in our FLT students the mind scope similar to that of the native speaker of the foreign language in question.

“The essence of socio-cultural approach to FLT is in viewing the foreign language as a means international communication, way to understand the world and national culture, as well as the social subcultures of the speakers of the language studied. Socio-cultural education which is driven by FLT is aimed at the development of a special type of world perception in the student. It aims at creating an individual who is receptive to the history of humanity and his own nation, building in him cultural and moral awareness on the global scale. Apart from that it also focuses on the development of communication skills and unraveling the students spiritual potential, teaching about ethically acceptable and legally justifiable forms of social self-expression and discussion, especially when the opponent has ideas or religious belief that differ from that of the student, as well as on the need for self-study” [4. Pp. 11–12].

FLT-driven socio-cultural education can produce good results if it is congruent with the principles of cultural dialogue in the educational context.

Exposure to the traditions and values of other nations and cultures contributes to the enrichment of cultural identity. Thus teaching foreign languages in the context of dialogue of cultures and civilizations requires from educators to take serious steps towards the analysis of culture-related authentic materials which can be used to simulate the cultural space mentioned in the classroom environment, with the student being constantly and continuously introduced to these foreign cultures [3. P. 222].

The hierarchical system of problem-oriented cultural knowledge is the methodological focus of socio-cultural education. This type of education is aimed at retrieval, analysis, aggregation, systematization and interpretation of cultural information. This results in the development of “polycultural communicative competence of the linguistic persona”.

Teaching which is based on the principle of cultural dialogue breeds respect towards other cultures, linguistic, ethnical and racial tolerance, communication cadence as well as readiness for understanding of other cultures and their heritage. “Dialogue of cultures is in its essence a peer-to-peer interaction of cultures, based on mutual understanding the representatives of such cultures. The main purpose of cultural dialogue is to achieve mutual understanding on all levels — linguistic, socio-cultural and axiological (understanding the values of the partner)” [7. P. 18].

Lipetzki methodological school of Professor Efim Passov has developed the theory of individuality development, with the principle of cultural dialogue lying at the core thereof. Communicative approach to FLT, being the cornerstone of this theory, focuses at the learner’s personality, experience, worldview, interests and feeling, which in their turn are considered at the organizational stage of the FLT lesson where both the learner and the teacher are equal communicative partners. E. Passov takes a two-fold approach to communicativeness, i.e. “as both a generic methodological category which proves the necessity to model FLT as a type of communication and a technology, i.e. a strategy in

the process of which the following parameters of communication are observed: motivation, purposefulness, individual meaning, verbal and cognitive activities, individualized approach, rapport (emotional, cognitive and personal), cooperation, contextuality, connection between speech and other activities, functionality (modeling of all speech functions), heuristic learning as opposed to pattern learning, content-richness as an objective characteristic of study materials and information-richness as the subjective one, problem-based organization and presentation of study materials, originality which implies permanent variation of all components of the teaching process, expressiveness and integration of verbal and non-verbal means of communication” [2. Pp. 81–82]. Communication-oriented FLT contributes to the expansion of the learner’s linguistic horizons: “For a learner, mastering a new means of communication means acquiring access to the values of the country which is new to him. Every new batch of study material to be learned is introduced as a phenomenon of the other nation’s culture” [2. P. 31]. Taking a two-fold approach towards ensuring the communicative nature of learning is ensured by the dialogue of the two cultures: the foreign and the native...

Orientation towards communication is the fundamental rule which lies behind the intensive approach to FLT is at the core of the theory put forward by Galina Kitaygorodskaya, who states that, “the leading role of student-centered communication is most evident in the implementation of the objectives of education. Since efficient foreign language communication teaching means ensuring the development of the student’s speech skills and communicative competence of the student, as the primary concern is the ability of the student to engage in real communication at the level of personal meanings, revealing and realizing their personal potential. Communicative context establishes a link between all the communicative tasks, ensures continuous and informal contacts of the teacher with the student group, allowing a comprehensive verbal and nonverbal impact on the individual learner, (mostly via other students)” [5. P. 84].

With the dynamic development of intercultural contacts substantially changes the model the international community as well as the principles of its existence. Humanity moves towards cultural pluralism, dialogue and a balance between cultures which allows them to develop harmoniously. The process of cross-cultural communication requires from the participant a communicative competence which is of vital importance in a multicultural society and is “designed to prevent the development of xenophobia, spread of intolerance and bar the development of intolerance” [6. P. 8].

As cultural communication is achieved by means of language that pervades the entire theoretical and practical activities of people, it’s resulting in the growth of motivation for learning the languages of other cultures.

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ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТИ В ПРОЦЕССЕ ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА

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В настоящее время происходят глобальные изменения в политике и экономике. Эти изменения обуславливают значимость изучения иностранных языков для развития личности. В.А. Гребенникова справедливо утверждает, что иностранные языки и их преподавание развивают гуманитарное знание и — шире — человечность; преподавание иностранных языков выступает как своего рода фильтр против как западной, так и восточной массовой культуры, оставляя то, что соответствует целевой культуре нетронутым, таким образом подчеркивая ее достоинства». Этот важный аспект предопределил новое направление в преподавании иностранных языков в России, сделав иностранные языки не обычным предметом, а средством для эффективной межкультурной и межнациональной коммуникации (В.В. Сафонова).

Социокультурный подход, который сейчас доминирует в образовательной среде, предполагает формирование культурной компетентности, т.е. представлении об особенностях картины мира носителя иностранного языка. Поэтому преподавание иностранного языка более не может ограничиваться обучением языковым конструкциям и правилам их использования.

Суть социокультурного подхода заключается в преподавании иностранных языков как средства межкультурной коммуникации и способа понимания иностранных культур и субкультур.

Эффективность социокультурного подхода обеспечивается эффективностью диалога между культурами и цивилизациями.

Ключевые слова: преподавание иностранного языка, иностранный язык, социокультурный подход, культура, цивилизация, межкультурная коммуникация