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ON DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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The article studies the causes of misunderstanding during intercultural communication. Developing communicative and intercultural competences is considered to be the main object of English language teaching. The article describes the elements of intercultural competence and their relevance for language teaching. The means of developing intercultural communication that can be used by English language teachers are discussed.

Key words: intercultural communication; communicative language teaching; communicative competence; intercultural competence; lingua culture; lingua franca; non-native speakers; native speakers.

О РАЗВИТИИ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ В ВЫСШИХ УЧЕБНЫХ ЗАВЕДЕНИЯХ

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В статье исследуются причины недопонимания при межкультурном общении. Развитие коммуникативных и межкультурных компетенций считается основной целью обучения английскому языку. В статье описаны элементы межкультурной компетенции и их значение для обучения языку. Обсуждаются средства развития межкультурного общения, которыми могут пользоваться преподаватели английского языка.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная коммуникация; коммуникативное обучение языку; коммуникативная компетенция; межкультурная компетенция; лингва-культура; лингва франка; неноситель языка; носитель языка.

Today it is strange to expect a community to be developing separately from other people, cultures, or languages. It is natural that people (or countries) try to establish relations with other nations and communities. In the

modern world of growing interconnectivity of people, goods and businesses, and increasing migration, everybody realises the importance of the English language. Teaching to communicate in English is believed to be one of the essential aims of 'English as a Foreign Language' (EFL) classes.

The main aim of higher educational institutions in Belarus is to prepare students for the world of work, to equip them not only with theoretical knowledge but practical skills and competencies concerning their professions. The Republic of Belarus is visited by tourists from various countries and in the majority of all cases it is English that is used for communication.

Moreover, in order to succeed in interpreting what people mean, English language learners have not only to gain an understanding of new words but also to understand how their cultures, cultural values and expectations differ not only from English speaking but also from other cultures [1]. Therefore, it is apparent that the students majoring, for example, in the tourism and hospitality industry should not only be able to communicate with foreign guests of Belarus but also have a broad knowledge of their cultures.

A lot of consideration has been paid by linguists and practical teachers to the ways English language teaching (ELT) is conducted. One of the most prominent approaches to ELT has been Communicative Language Teaching which states that the goal of language teaching is to cultivate communicative competence, which includes linguistic knowledge and language skills that the speaker needs to acquire in order to communicate successfully in a speech community.

A more detailed approach to the notion of communicative competence was offered by Canale and Swain who in their turn described its four dimensions. These are: grammatical competence (i.e. grammatical and lexical knowledge); sociolinguistic competence which includes “understanding of social context, in which communication takes place” (e.g. role relationships, the shared information of the participants, and the communicative purpose for their interaction); discourse competence which refers to the ability to interpret a message in terms of its coherence and cohesion; strategic competence according to which speakers are expected to employ appropriate communication strategies [2, p.160].

This description of communicative competence refers to communication between a non-native and native English language speakers. It has been noted, however, that this concept sees second language users as being somehow poor or second rate compared to native speakers of a language. It is unjust since even speakers who share a first language and culture can have different levels of knowledge of their language and social background [3]. Moreover, numerous linguists warn that Anglo culture should

not be seen as a paradigm. For example, Wierzbicka [4, p.208] cautions against using the English language for a semantic analysis of other languages “because like any other natural language - it carries with it a particular, culture-specific universe of meaning” and therefore puts an Anglo perspective on it.

On the other hand, it is known that today the amount of non-native users of English far outweighs the number of native speakers. Therefore, English is suggested to be seen and taught as a lingua franca and as a lingua franca used for developing intercultural communication. Today, it is widely understood that communication between people requires something more than just knowledge of lexis and grammar - it needs intercultural competence.

A number of linguists point out a close connection between the language and the culture of the people speaking it. Culture can be defined as “a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” [5, p.20]. So, here, we discuss not so much the visible elements of culture (such as music, art and literature, etc.) but its bottom-of-the iceberg part (people’s values, beliefs, attitudes, viewpoints, etc.).

Recently, intercultural communication and multiculturalism have been paid serious attention in English language teaching. Developing the abilities of communication with the representatives of other cultures can take place even at the lowest levels of students’ proficiency. It should be noted that in the majority of cases teaching culture in class focuses on teaching Anglo-culture and communication with English native speakers. However, it is obvious that language learners should be prepared for the demanding task of interacting with a range of cultural groups.

The framework for developing the skills of successful intercultural communication in EFL classes can be based on Byram’s model of intercultural competence which consists of five elements.

The first involves the attitudes of people towards themselves and other societies, the cultures of their own and others and tolerance towards them. This also refers to the processes of cultural self-assessment which leads to self-identification as well as of abandoning ethnocentric attitudes. The second element is said to refer to “the knowledge of interaction: individual and societal, 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” [3, p.150]. The next covers the skill of communicators to analyze non-native cultural phenomena, and to compare them to the ones from their own. The last two elements refer to the competencies of learners to employ the knowledge acquired in class in real life communication and to

evaluate cultural practices and products of their own and other communities [3].

These elements defining intercultural competence should be intertwined into language teaching practice and facilitate the exploration of the complexity of both local and foreign cultures. First of all, by analyzing their own cultural characteristics students can realize the diversity and complexity of local and national cultures. For example, while discussing hierarchical and egalitarian cultures, they come to the conclusion that the elements of these opposite dimensions can be met in Belarus. Using their own experience, students come to the understanding that even within one country there can be a “diversity of linguistic and cultural identifications and groupings, such as different heritage languages, religions and family backgrounds” [3, p.195].

In EFL and intercultural communication classes students can also become aware of the characteristics of cultures other than their own. This, for example, can take place while contrasting different countries based on one criterion (masculine/ feminine, collective/ individual culture, etc.). The results of these comparisons should lead to the awareness of challenges learners can face while interacting with the representatives of other cultures and the ways to overcome them.

Finally, students should come to the understanding that despite the existence of values and beliefs typical to a particular culture there can be individual differences. Therefore, while interacting with a representative of a foreign culture they should try to avoid any generalisations. It is also important that students are not only provided with theoretical knowledge of different cultures but were also given an opportunity to gain an experience of dealing with possible communicative challenges.

Different learning materials should be used in and outside the class so students are able to study the images and descriptions of not only Anglo but other cultures. While analysing cross-cultural scenarios, students can learn how culture influences people’s behaviour, predict the challenges they would face in intercultural communication and even exercise their communicative skills.

Even more, students can be asked to explore cultural representations in the media and arts both online (websites, blogs, podcasts) and in more ‘traditional’ media (movies, TV and radio programmes, newspapers, and magazines). A considerable number of learners have regularly travelled or even lived abroad. So, students can share their experiences of other cultures, intercultural communication, and also compare and contrast the cultures they are familiar with. Finally, students can be engaged in intercultural communication both face to face (e.g. international conferences, business meetings, etc.) and electronically (by sending emails or using social media).

To sum up, it is important to distinguish between the elements of English language communicative competence and the ways of its development in EFL classes. On a par with linguistic competence, significant attention should be paid to improving/working on intercultural competence. The latter includes developing the knowledge and acceptance as well as the skills of critical evaluation of not only other but one's own culture. It is important that intercultural education is practice-oriented. This can be achieved in EFL classes at all levels of language proficiency.

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ПСИХОЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ОСНОВЫ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ: СОДЕРЖАНИЕ ПОНЯТИЯ И МОДЕЛЬ

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Анализ понятий коммуникации и общения позволил выделить перцептивный компонент как ведущую причину их различий, характеристики которого обуславливают рациональность признания коммуникации основополагающим понятием в условиях моделирования ситуаций речевого взаимодействия в учебных целях. Компонентами структуры межкультурной коммуникации признаны отправитель, получатель, сообщение, кодирование / декодирование, обратная связь и национально-культурная призма.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная коммуникация; моделирование процесса межкультурной коммуникации.