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CULTURAL ASPECT OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Teaching a foreign language presupposes considering a lot of correlated aspects that are treated in language studies, as well as the part language occupies in our life. In general, language teaching aims at developing communication skills of students. During the course of studies both speech and writing competences are developed, that represent the target of competent communication ability.

However, teaching a foreign language has one more important educational function – introduction of learners to the culture of a foreign language, it fosters the study of foreign cultures, especially the culture of the country whose language is being taught, as a way of preparation for cross-cultural communication. This is especially important as language has a

unique role in the life of human beings. A language, as such, is not only a means of expression of a particular view of the world by a definite nation (according to Wilhelm von Humboldt); it is of a significance as it is able to express a separate culture.

Culture has been defined as *the shared values, traditions, norms, customs, arts, history, folklore, and institutions of a group of people*. Culture also embraces experience and norms that regulate human life, people`s attitudes to different and new ideas and their views. Consequently, teaching a foreign language has cross-cultural importance. Cultural competence presupposes extralinguistic knowledge, skills and ways of appropriate behavior when communicating with representatives of other cultures, ability to perform cross-cultural communication based on language knowledge and cultural awareness and its appropriate implementation in different situations when coming into contact with representatives of different cultures with the purpose of better mutual understanding.

Such awareness of foreign culture aims at understanding of a given culture, as each nation has its own way of world perception that differs from the ones of other peoples. Mutual understanding in the dialogue of cultures may only be gained by understanding of a foreign culture, by its respect and acknowledgement of its importance. It includes awareness and respect of the system of values of another nation.

That is why one of the most important competences of knowing a foreign language is knowledge of a foreign culture and ability to conduct cross-cultural communication. This awareness of a foreign culture in comparison with one`s own serves both broadening views of a learner and best realization and insight into his own culture, which are necessary not only for education and personal self- development, but also for a

practical purpose – ability to communicate in a foreign language.

Understanding culture helps us to understand how others interpret their environment. Culture forms people's perception of the world and their behavior, it defines personal and group values and attitudes.

In the paper *The Relationship Between Language and Culture and the Implications for Language Teaching* A. N. Leveridge states that the relationship between language and culture is deeply rooted [1]. Language is used to maintain and convey culture and cultural ties. Different ideas stem from differing language use within one's culture and the whole intertwining of these relationships start at one's birth. From birth, the child's life, opinions, and language are shaped by what it comes in contact with. Brooks argues that behaviours which are acceptable will vary from location to location thus forming the basis of different cultures. It is from these differences that one's view of the world is formed [2]. Hantrais thinks that culture is the beliefs and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language is the means of expression [3]. Therefore, everyone's views are dependent on the culture which has influenced them, as well as being described using the language which has been formed by that culture. The understanding of a culture and its people can be broadened by the knowledge of their language. Emmitt and Pollock argue that even if people are brought up under similar behavioural backgrounds or cultural situations but however speak different languages, their world view may be very different [4]. As Sapir-Whorf argues, different thoughts are brought about by the use of different forms of language. One is limited by the language used to express one's ideas [5, p. 124]. Language represents a material form of consciousness, it is a system of signs that serve the means of human communication and awareness of the world around us, the means of

transmission of one's consciousness. Therefore people who share a culture but speak different languages, will have different world views. So language is rooted in culture and culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to the next [4]. That is why language is regarded as one of the main bases of national identity. From this, one can see that learning a new language involves learning a new culture [6].

This fundamental role of language for the life of a nation has been realized for a long time. Only after having a language in common can people speak about cross-cultural communication. This fact has been used throughout the human history both for forming a common cultural space and while creating empires when a language of a more powerful nation became a means of international communication.

Nowadays we have come across a new trend in the language policy – globalization of the English language. On the one hand, there is nothing new in this phenomenon. At different times different cultures gained prominence and their languages became prevailing for the whole educated world, like Latin used to be the language of science and in a way has retained its importance up to the present time; knowledge of the French language was thought to be obligatory for everybody belonging to European culture in the XVIII and most part of the XIX centuries. The German language became widespread during the first half of the 20-th century succeeded by the Russian language after the World Wars. All these languages coexisted with national languages, and in spite of all political difficulties, enriched them and the people of other cultures by the achievements in the fields of science, literature and art.

On the other hand, we see that the position of the English language nowadays differs from the status of other universal languages in many ways. *This process is aided by the increasing influence of television and internet which have*

brought down the world to a single “village”. Such a reality shows that our world has entered the age of globalization of the English language, in which most observers see a tendency towards homogeneity of values and norms [7, p. 7]. Again we must admit that there is nothing new in this phenomenon to some extent. We can also well understand that it is impossible to exercise influence over other nations if you cannot communicate in one language. However we feel that this time we have come across the language invasion that threatens the survival of many other languages and lessens their importance and, as a consequence, other nations and cultures, as all other languages but English are regarded as less significant.

We have already mentioned in one of our previous publications [8, p. 609-614] the only way out we can suggest – a symbiosis of cultures that will preserve a rich variety of cultures and languages which make our world so diverse and unique. **Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines the term symbioses as** interaction between two different organisms living in close physical association, typically to the advantage of both [9]. The term also embraces mutually beneficial relationship between different people or groups. The origin of the word comes from Greek – meaning *living together*, from *sumbios* *companion*.

The opposite of symbioses is antibiosis – a biological interaction between two or more organisms that is detrimental to at least one of them; it can also be an antagonistic association between an organism and the metabolic substances produced by another. We suggest that the above mentioned definitions are pertinent to the relations of people and cultures as everything in the world was created according to the principle of similarities.

Speaking about multicultural symbiosis in language use we should consider language policy which larger nations exercise over smaller nations as well as correct ways of teaching a

foreign language, so that learning of an alien language becomes really beneficial for the people who learn it.

Language policy must not only include, but respect local languages. No language should be placed on a level of lower importance than another. Learner's native language, its usage, and complexities ought to be used as a means to create better linguistic comprehension as well as cultural understanding. At the same time we should try to protect and develop our native languages while teaching a foreign language. We should keep in mind that by giving away our native languages by and by we not only give away our languages that represent the basis of our psyches, world perception and culture, but are on a way of losing national identities. In other words, instead of language symbiosis, which should be beneficial to everybody, we may enter an era of language antibiosis.

This question is of paramount importance for language teachers at all levels of education and should be especially considered while teaching English at Universities which not only prepare highly qualified professionals, but also form a definite attitude as to how and in what direction any science should develop. Teaching different courses of translation may be one way of solving the problem, as translation has always been regarded not only as a transmitter of truth and knowledge, but also of culture. While realizing that the English speaking world has the upper hand in developing most sciences and technologies nowadays, and we cannot catch up with it, we have to acknowledge the fact that many English words will enter other languages in the natural course of events. But we should try to find equivalents for most foreign terms until they have come into common use and in this way try to develop our own languages as well. That is what can be done while teaching courses of translation. It will give students not only a better understanding of the subject matter, but a habit of finding equivalents for foreign terms in a native language. It

will teach them respect to their languages and the responsibility for preserving and developing them. At the same time any university program should include courses on cultural studies of both native country and Anglo-American world showing similarities and differences in world perception, attitudes to moral and ethical values, differences in life styles.

Language teachers must instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage, choose culturally appropriate teaching styles, and explain culturally based linguistic differences to promote understanding instead of misconceptions or prejudices. They should create awareness and understandings of cultural differences, and incorporate the cultural values of those being taught.

Language teachers must realize that their explanations and attitudes will always be interpreted. The meaning has a cultural context. So not only the meaning of the language used must be explained, but the cultural context in which it is placed as well. As Porter argues, misunderstandings between people who speak different languages often evolve because of such differing cultural roots, ideologies, and cultural boundaries which limit expression [10].

A. N. Leveridge mentions the following qualities, which are essential for a multicultural educator: awareness of your own cultural values and biases, attitudes and beliefs; cultural self-awareness and sensitivity to one's own cultural heritage; awareness of how your own cultural background and experiences have influenced attitudes, values, and biases about psychological processes; recognize the limits of multicultural competence and expertise; possession of knowledge about one's social impact upon others [1]. One should be knowledgeable about communication style differences, how one's style may clash with or foster the teaching process with others different from themselves. One should value

bilingualism and do not view another language as an impediment to teaching.

Cultural competence is based on respect, openness towards people with different social and cultural perceptions than your own, as people tend to have an *ethnocentric* view in which they see their own culture as the best. **Promotion of cross-cultural communication may be seen as one way out for overcoming language aggression of one culture.** Communication provides an opportunity for students of different cultures to learn from each other. So it is important to build skills that enhance communication.

However, just speaking about the importance and value of each language and each culture for educated humanity does not help to solve the problem. We will never resolve a problem of multicultural or multi-language symbiosis if we do not think about certain attempts to come to a solution.

In connection with this we may recall T.S. Eliot's attitude to the national problem and his ambiguous stance towards all those parts of the United Kingdom that are not England and not English. On the one hand, he affirmed diversity of culture and insisted on the need for what he termed *regions* to remain culturally distinct. In «Notes towards the Definition of Culture» he argued that «*a man should feel himself to be, not merely a citizen of a particular nation, but a citizen of a particular part of his country, with local loyalties*» [11, p. 125]. On the other hand, he distinguishes them from what those he labeled *the greater peoples*, in which England was included but not its regions. What matters is the *regions*, whom he calls *satellite cultures*, contribution to the richness and complexity of English culture. He offers two reasons for the sustaining of local cultures, the first being that «*any vigorous small people wants to preserve its individuality. The other reason for the preservation of local culture is one which is also a reason for the satellite culture continuing to be satellite, and not going so*

far as to try to cut itself off completely. It is that the satellite exercises a considerable influence upon stronger culture; and so plays a larger part in the world at large than it could in isolation. But it is the other side of the question that interests me more, for it is the side that has received less acknowledgement. It is that the survival of the satellite culture is of very great value to the stronger culture» [12].

This brings us to the main argument of our paper: a language as such is not only a means of expression of a particular view of the world by a definite nation (according to Wilhelm von Humboldt); it is of a significance as it is able to express a separate culture. And only that language or cultural policy may be considered to be right if it allows a culture, any culture, to become known to the world at large, to say its say in the dialogue of cultures. This is especially important for small nations who will never be able to feel self-respect if bigger or greater nations don't listen to what they have to say, don't study from the wisdom they have acquired. This problem should gain special importance while teaching students a foreign language which should be based on acquiring language competences together with broad cultural studies of other countries as well as development of respect to one's own language and realization of responsibility for its preservation and development.

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