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THE ROLE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The article is devoted to the place of culture in a foreign language classroom. Native and target cultures, being in mutual dependence, determine the special content of education, which is in practice intended to implement the dialogue of cultures.

Key words: *culture, cultural identity, intercultural competence, cultural awareness, socio-cultural approach, dialogue of cultures.*

Rapid expansion of digital technologies has led to significant changes in every aspect of life. While television broadcasting and satellite transmission supported transformation of the world into a global village, worldwide proliferation of the Internet usage has increased the acceleration of communication and removed boundaries of time and space. Communication has gained new dimensions with the emergence of electronic communication networks. As a result, people encounter many foreign languages and cultures every day. Living in this type of environment, people (especially young) are influenced by many different cultures. There is a real danger of possible erosion of national cultures and values by the forces of globalization.

Since humans are fundamentally social beings, individuals cannot live without cultures of their own. J. Bruner notes that «culture shapes mind...it provides us with the tool kit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conceptions of ourselves and our powers». He further states that «you cannot understand mental activity unless you take into account the cultural setting and its resources, the very things that give mind its shape and scope. Learning, remembering, talking, imaging: all of them are made possible by participating in a culture» [1, p. X–XI].

According to B. Hall, culture is a «historically shared system of symbolic resources through which we make our world meaningful» [2, p. 4]. Others consider culture as «a negotiated set of shared symbolic systems that guide individuals' behaviors and incline them to function as a group» [3, p. 26]. As a shared system or a negotiated set of shared symbolic systems human culture serves as a context within which we communicate. Culture tells us who we are, what positions we hold in our society, with whom and in what language we communicate. In this particular sense, individuals in a society are in fact cultural persons; each was born into a culture and grows up to become a cultural being.

Identity is an important feature of a person's psyche, since it defines one's relationship to other humans. Social identity is based on memberships of social groups (e.g. a nation, an ethnic group, a religious group etc.). These identifications with different relationships and roles help people to define their own individuality

and to position themselves in the world relative to other people. Cultural identities (the identities which people construct on the basis of their membership of cultural groups) are a particular type of social identity [4, p. 13].

One of the current tasks that teachers and university professors face today is the necessity of bringing up a multicultural personality with a strong socio-cultural outlook. It is important to pay students' attention to similarities and differences in the perception of reality by different ethnic groups.

Cultural learning touches three spheres: empathy and understanding, knowledge, and communicative skill. A foreign language course which incorporates all three aspects trains its learners for intercultural competence.

Many scholars have emphasized the importance of the development of intercultural competence in the study of foreign languages since it involves the ability to perceive facts about different cultures with tolerance, a desire to see the behavior of its native speakers with their own eyes. Only in this case it is possible to enrich the native language and culture.

Intercultural competence is a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one to understand and respect people with different cultural relationship; respond appropriately and respectfully when communicating with such people; understand oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural «difference» [4, p. 16–17].

According to M. Byram, foreign language teaching (further referred to as *FLT*) should include four fundamental components, namely, language learning, language awareness, cultural awareness and cultural experience. The most significant value of this model is that foreign language learners are educated to understand themselves and people around them. It also gives a positive view on students' first language because students might use a comparative approach in raising their both language and cultural awareness [5].

Language is a medium of communication that expresses and embodies cultural reality. So, language and culture are closely related and interactive. Culture is transmitted and meant in great part through language; cultural patterns in turn are reflected in language. Learning a language therefore implies learning something about culture as well. This is certainly true for one's first language, but also for further languages acquired.

The socio-cultural approach which now dominates the educational environment has among its strategic values the formation of cultural awareness. We consider cultural awareness as a system of knowledge about the cultural space (the form of existence of culture in the minds of its representatives) and the cultural background of the country as a whole. The socio-cultural approach makes it possible to make the learners aware of their own country and nation's history, of the differences between themselves and people from other backgrounds, especially

differences in attitudes and values.

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. [6, p. 90].

Natural languages illustrate culture and mentality of people, express national and linguistic world pictures, which reflect the fundamental moral and value orientations of ethnic groups. The leading issue in modern education is the search for efficient ways of education and development of the personality, capable of self-determination in the world of culture.

L. Shcherba emphasized that foreign language learning leads to selfcognition by which he meant an important role of languages in understanding the spiritual life of the speakers. According to him foreign language learning also improves the knowledge of the mother tongue which cannot be studied thoroughly without speaking a foreign language [7, p. 344–365].

Gaining knowledge of a foreign culture should be based on its dialogue with the native culture. Native and target cultures, being in mutual dependence (target culture is learned through native culture, native culture is overestimated through target culture), determine the special content of education which is intended to implement in practice the dialogue of cultures, to make it dominant in the consciousness of the individual, who learns native and target cultural data. The student «embodies» culture (native and target) for himself, assuming its products as personally significant, introducing them into his individual space of value coordinates. [8].

Russian philosopher M. Bakhtin considered the dialogue of cultures to be one of the most important conditions for the development and formation of a personality. «A foreign culture only in the eyes of another culture reveals itself fuller and deeper. One meaning reveals its depths, meeting and coming into contact with another, alien meaning: a dialogue begins between them» [9, p. 354]. The dialogue of cultures as the most productive type of intercultural interaction is characterized by the presence of mutual perception of two or more cultures.

Awareness of a foreign culture contributes to understanding your own culture. The findings suggest that foreign language lessons form an effective basis for introducing not only the culture of a foreign country but the local culture too [10, p. 155].

Learning English as a second or foreign language is not simply a matter of code switching. With self-identity received from learners' home culture, learners can confidently grasp pragmatic implications of the target language and probably make further progress in communicating through the target language [11, p. 44]. Thus, FLT cannot be separated from the awareness of differences between the home and target culture. Making foreign language learners aware of their own

culture may enhance language learning [11, p. 48].

But what adds to the complexity of the issue is the fact that our culture is so pervasive that we don't ever think about the effects it has on our way of life, our thoughts, our actions, etc. as the proverb has it: «The last thing a fish would ever notice would be water». So, when educators decide to develop intercultural competence, the learning process still calls for the learner's cultural awareness and self-analysis. Encouraging the learner to self-analyze and reflect on his / her identity is not only difficult considering nuances of the concept, but also dangerous as this process can also lead to stereotyping. So it has to be guided, and teachers need to look at the concept of identity from a new perspective.

Teaching foreign languages in the context of dialogue of cultures requires from educators to take serious steps towards the analysis of culture-related materials which can be used to simulate the cultural space in the classroom environment, with the student being constantly and continuously introduced to these cultures. As no textbook perfectly integrates language and culture education, teachers need to build up supplemental activities to make culture learning a consistent component of their language classes. Thus, the introduction of the cultural content into language education involves decisions related to the selection of topics, themes and perspectives.

Currently, the issue of knowledge of the country, the place where a person was born and grew up, is relevant due to many circumstances.

Belarus is a small republic, and many people around the world don't even know that it exists. And though it may sound surprising for the Belarusians, but people often do not even identify us as a separate state. Moreover, even some Belarusians do not have a clear sense of national identity.

As experience shows, students often possess better knowledge of the British culture, than of the Belarusian culture. Many young people have difficulty identifying the outstanding figures of their homeland as well as the landmarks of Belarus.

We believe that a foreign language course for university students should include instructional modules that allow students to study different cultures. As during the school course due to immaturity of students and their little life experience intercultural competences can be acquired rather than **developed**.

In the first module «Proud to be Belarusian» they study their own culture before «travelling to unknown areas». Learning the module, the students become aware that they belong to a specific culture. By reviewing their own culture, students acquire the vocabulary to describe familiar values, customs, traditions, rituals, and symbols. They learn about Belarusians who became famous in different spheres of life – science, literature, music, cinema, sport, medicine – or even helped to bring about radical changes in other countries' development. As soon as

students learn to talk about their own culture, they can discuss other peoples' cultural values and symbols. Our intention is to acquaint students with some basic cultural notions, to prepare them to talk about different cultures, and to develop their intellectual competence.

It should be mentioned that efficient teaching can only take place when – alongside with listening and reading texts on cultural issues – varied culture oriented activities and interactive tasks are introduced, such as:

- discussions or debates based on a set of questions related to cultural and cross-cultural issues,
- brainstorming tasks consisting in the pooling of ideas or solutions to a given problem,
- role-plays based on role-cards presenting conflicting opinions,
- mind mapping,
- compare and contrast tasks calling for a comparative analysis of a given aspect of life in two cultures,
- web-quests,
- projects based on internet exchanges, where students are encouraged to reflect on their own culture and to justify their opinions.

Most of the above activities base on the analysis of differences and reflection on one's own culture and identity.

In addition to practical classes aimed at bridging the gap between cultures an effective tool is the use of gaming activity which, in addition to controlling functions, is also used for cognition and motivation. For example, in the end of the module «Proud to be Belarusian» students can prepare quizzes for their group-mates including the most interesting facts about their homeland and its people and organize a kind of tournament «BSPU#quiz#Belarus» which not only boosts their potential but also motivates them to take a closer look at their own native land.

In conclusion it should be mentioned that culture isn't just a list of holidays or religious traditions; it is personal experience unique to each individual. As educators, it's our job to encourage the development of students' intelligence. Pursuing the goals of multifaceted personal development, bringing the learning process closer to reality, motivating educational activities, enhancing creative abilities, and building socio-cultural and intercultural competences the teacher should cultivate in students a sense of pride in the cultural heritage of their native land, form the attitude towards other cultures as a value, enrich their own moral, aesthetic and ideological experience.

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РАЗВИТИЕ ИНОЯЗЫЧНОЙ КОММУНИКАТИВНОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ БУДУЩЕГО СПЕЦИАЛИСТА ПОСРЕДСТВОМ ДИАЛОГИЧЕСКОГО ОБЩЕНИЯ

Для продуктивного взаимодействия в профессиональной, научной и межличностной сфере необходимо наличие коммуникативных качеств, объединяющих в себе ценностные ориентации, нравственные позиции, знания, умения, этику общения. Задачи обучения иностранному языку как средству общения неразрывно связаны с задачами овладения основами общественной и культурной жизни стран и народов изучаемого языка. В данной статье иноязычная коммуникативная культура рассматривается как часть общей человеческой культуры, а наиболее продуктивным средством ее формирования выступает диалогическое общение.

Ключевые слова: обучение иностранному языку, иноязычная коммуникативная культура, диалогическое общение.