

## Exploring Language through Culture in ESL classroom

*Some aspects of culture influence on the process of teaching foreign language, English in particular, are considered in the article. The author pays special attention to culture specific information in the process of foreign language learning and developing international communication skills.*

*В статье рассмотрены некоторые аспекты влияния культуры на процесс обучения иностранному языку, в частности английскому. Автор уделяет внимание изучению культурно значимой информации в процессе изучения иностранного языка и развития навыков межкультурной коммуникации.*

Nowadays there are many approaches to teaching foreign languages. The importance of taking into consideration cultural aspects in ESL classroom is, of course, not new and much talked about. There are series of publications related to the matter. Moreover, many universities have programs which include culture-specific courses into the programs of pre-service second language teacher training.

The purpose of the article is to present the authors view on the problem and describe some important aspects of teaching English as a second language paying attention to cultural phenomena which in one way or another influence our communication and even our cognitive activity, i.e. the way we perceive the world. Researchers state that that challenges of the twenty first century move second/foreign language instruction towards a more cultural focus [4, p. 31]. Cultural background of the language which is taught becomes especially important under the condition of completely different cultural environment. Thus, if the language is learned in a country where it is spoken the learner is exposed to the cultural environment and everything flows naturally. The person perceives a culture specific notion and finds a relevant language means which names it. We come across a different situation when the language is learned in a foreign country. It is comparatively easy to teach learners some language structures, a set of vocabulary etc., but it is a long way to obtaining language competence which is, in fact, should be the aim of language teaching.

On the one hand, learning English as lingua franca implies obtaining basic command of the language which would make communication possible, i.e. successful information exchange. On the other hand, there is no language without culture. Any language is a part of the culture, alike the culture composes a significant part of a language (though this statement can be disputed). Although in modern world ideas of multiculturalism are greatly popularized, the culture specific information

cannot and should not be neglected. One more important aspect is that it is rather difficult to get learners interested in the language by the language itself; usually it works the other way round, i.e. the culture can become a strong motivator for language learning as it can arouse learner's interest in the culture and language.

At the same time it is well-known that there is a great number of works relating to intercultural competence development (for instance see one of numerous works of Michael Byram [2]), but the state of things shows that there is neither a specially designed academic course nor textbooks which would cover the main aspects of developing intercultural competence of English language teachers whose first language is Ukrainian. Although many universities have in their curricula of pre-service English teacher training courses aimed at developing background cultural knowledge of the countries where the language is spoken, the mentioned courses usually provide the prospective teachers mostly with the information about such-and-such a country neglecting the issues of methods and techniques of developing intercultural competence. In fact, similar tendency can be observed even in the USA. Thus, according to Elisabeth Arevalo-Guerrero intercultural communication courses in the US are mainly found in ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) programs, not in general teacher education programs. Unfortunately, the field of foreign language teaching has not seen this as crucial training for their undergraduate or graduate programs. Therefore, teachers of foreign languages are urged to complement their pedagogical training with professional development courses, workshops, and conferences that focus on the development of intercultural communication competence in language teaching [1, p. 358].

It means that there is a great need in an academic course which would be aimed at, on the one hand, further developing personal intercultural competence of prospective teachers, and, on the other hand, providing necessary tools of singling out essential cultural information, as well as methodological ways and means of developing intercultural competence of students.

The theoretical part of the course could cover the main aspects of intercultural communication competence of prospective teachers of English as a second language. The work would dwell on the meaning of the concept of intercultural communication competence, its content, and significance. Moreover, attention should be paid to role of international communication skills in second language acquisition, issues concerning English language teaching in the context of language culture nexus, including the influence of culture on the language, its vocabulary, grammar, communication patterns, and their significance for successful second language acquisition. Finally, it will analyse existing EU approaches to teaching English as a second language via intercultural communication skills development from the point of view of their application at Ukrainian teacher training universities.

The methodological part of the course should cover main aspects of application and implementation of developing an international communication skills approach into English language teacher training practice. We entirely agree with Iskra Georgieva who states that “it is more important to concentrate on skills than knowledge and on encouraging learners to analyse the familiar cultural world around them as a basis for intercultural comparison and reflection” [3, p. 77]. Firstly, the emphasis is to be paid on working out universal principles of training teachers of English as a second language with special regard to international communication competence development. Secondly, it should deal with main specific points for teaching students whose first language is Ukrainian. Finally, there is a necessity to concentrate on main aspects of figuring out social and cultural information necessary for intercultural communication, ways of defining social and culture-specific information, means and techniques of evaluating authentic educational materials from the point of view of international communication skills development etc.

Thus, the outcomes of the project and the proposed academic course may contribute to advances in the English as a second language teacher training process at higher English teacher training educational establishments in Ukraine. Moreover, a well-elaborated international communication competence course would be successful both in formal and informal foreign language teacher professional development programmes.

#### **REFERENCES**

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