

ІННОВАЦІЙНІ МЕТОДИ ФОРМУВАННЯ ІНШОМОВНОЇ КОМУНІКАТИВНОЇ КУЛЬТУРИ

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TEACHING ADULTS COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THROUGH THE FOUR SKILLS: A FOCUS ON INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Стаття аналізує формування чотирьох мовних навичок, що відіграють ключову роль у розвитку комунікативної компетенції дорослих, як проявів інтерпретації та реалізації усної або письмової частини дискурсу, а також як способу прояву інших компонентів комунікативної компетенції.

Ключові слова: міжкультурна компетенція, чотири мовні навички, культурний шок.

В статье анализируется формирование четырех языковых навыков, что играют ключевую роль в развитии коммуникативной компетенции взрослых учащихся, как проявлений интерпретации и воспроизведения устной или письменной части дискурса, а также как способа проявления остальных компонентов коммуникативной компетенции.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная компетенция, четыре языковых навыка, культурный шок.

In the article the developing of four language skills playing a key role in fostering adult learners' communicative competence since they are the manifestations of interpreting and producing a spoken or written piece of discourse, as well as a way of manifesting the rest of the components of the communicative competence construct is analyzed.

Keywords: intercultural competence, four language skills, cultural bumps.

The last five decades have witnessed vast changes in our understanding of how languages are learnt, and subsequently taught. Empirical results from linguistics, psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology and sociolinguistics have better established the complex nature of language learning: it has become evident that linguistic, psychological and sociocultural factors play a key role in this process. Furthermore, these results have also shown that communication is a pivotal point in language learning and that the degree of success achieved in this process depends much on how meaning is negotiated in communication.

In trying to develop adult learners' overall communicative competence in the target language through the four language skills, we have decided to focus particularly on the intercultural competence as being the approach less taken in the language class. In the first stage, *i.e. Explanation*, the teacher explains to adult learners the concept of intercultural competence in order to make them aware of the importance of paying attention to the culture of the target language. Once the concept has been introduced, learners are told they are to explore the culture of the target language and they are presented with a list of key areas that offer the possibility for developing intercultural competence, including *Family, Education, Law and Order or Power and Politics* among others – the topics interesting or important for adult learners. The choice of topics follows Duffy and Mayes' [3] project on how best to explore another culture. In the second step, *i.e. Collection*, adult learners are given the task to gather material outside the classroom in relation with the cultural topics they have agreed to work with in the first stage. Adult learners are recommended to collect material from a variety of sources including photocopied information from different printed materials, photo–documentaries, pictures, video or DVD scenes, recorded material like interviews to native speakers, experts from the internet and the like. The good thing of this activity is that learners' cultural awareness is further increased through having to question themselves what is culturally representative of the given topic.

In the third stage, *i.e. Implementation*, learners work with a variety of activities that require their use of the four skills (*i.e.*, listening, speaking, reading and writing) in order to develop their overall communicative competence, and promote their cross-cultural awareness and understanding.

Listening skill. Activities such as video-taped cultural dialogues, audio- or video-taped cultural misunderstandings and taped-recorded interviews with native speakers, among many others, could promote listening skills with a special emphasis on the intercultural competence.

– In *video-taped cultural dialogues*, the adult learners view a video sketch where two people of different cultures are discussing an area of a cultural topic that the project focuses on. One of them is from the learners' own culture whereas the other is from the target culture. The teacher plans pre-, while- and post-listening questions to raise learners' cross-cultural awareness while practicing listening. For example, a pre-listening question could request learners to predict the opinion of the two persons with regard to the given topic. While-listening question could require them to confirm or reject their predictions made on the pre-listening phase. Finally, the post-listening question could ask them to critically discuss the opinion of the person from the target culture.

– Listening to *audio- or video-taped intercultural misunderstanding* [6] is another useful activity to further sharpen learners' awareness of cultural differences. Learners can be required to listen to a situation that reports a real-life intercultural misunderstanding that causes people to become confused or offended and can then be asked to get into pairs or groups in order to come up with an explanation of such misunderstanding, which will inevitably increase their intercultural awareness.

– *Taped-recorded interviews with native speakers* is another useful activity type particularly suitable for practicing the intercultural competence. Here adult learners get into groups and are assigned the responsibility of tape-recording an informal interview with a native speaker they know. Learners should choose a cultural topic the project is based on and prepare questions on that topic for the interview. In class, the interviews are played and learners compare the opinion of the interviewee on the particular topic with their own opinion [10]. These spontaneous recorded conversations offer two benefits. First, they give learners the chance to be exposed to natural language by listening to the native speaker's responses, something which is difficult to find in scripted material. Second, they encourage learners to become aware of their common problems with grammar, pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary and the like by listening to themselves.

– All recorded material gathered by the learners in the second stage of the project (i.e., interviews, TV or radio news, films, documentaries, songs, jokes or anecdotes, among others) could be used as the starting point of a modest *Listening Library* of culture-specific material.

Speaking skill. Activity formats such as face-to-face tandem learning, making up questions to a native speaker or role-playing, among others, may develop speaking skills with a particular emphasis on the intercultural component.

– *Face-to-face tandem learning*, that is, collaborative oral learning between speakers of different languages is a type of activity particularly suitable for fostering learners' intercultural communicative competence. Typically, teachers arrange opportunities for all learners to get engaged in face-to-face tandem, and once learners have got to know their partners and have arranged the time and place for the tandem sessions, they are asked to choose a particular cultural topic among those dealt with in the project and talk about it with their corresponding partners. All recorded tandem conversations could be added to the *Listening Library* and be used as the basis to prepare additional activities that make learners reflect on linguistic, pragmatic, intercultural-related issues (e.g., tone of voice, silence) and strategic features underlying these oral interactions [7].

– The activity of *making up questions to a native speaker* could also be an interesting one. A native speaker in the target language (for example, a foreign exchange student) could visit the class and learners could be assigned the task of preparing questions in small groups in order to interview the visitor.

– Another activity that may work well in the oral skills class is *role-playing*. In particular, this activity has been claimed to be suitable for practicing the cultural variations in speech acts such as apologizing, suggesting, complimenting, among others [5].

– All aural, visual and reading materials gathered by the learners in the second step of the project, can be utilized in some productive activities as background for promoting speaking. For example, as suggested by Shumin [8] nonverbal videos can be played in class to have adult learners act out or describe what they view.

Reading skill. Critical reading, reading to make judgments about how a text is argued, is a beneficial reflective activity type for promoting learners' intercultural competence while practicing the reading ability. In carrying out this activity, the general framework based on pre-, during-, and post-reading instruction could be of help [7].

– Teachers can also make adult learners read situations in which there is a *cultural bump*, that is, a situation that cause people to become uncomfortable or strange given particular cultural beliefs and attitudes. Then, different written interpretations of the behavior of the people involved in the situation can follow the account in a multiple choice format to allow class discussion and subsequently, check whether learners have correctly interpreted what went wrong and why people acted as they did, which will definitely help learners become aware and understand behavior in a target culture [11].

– Learners could also be required to analyze two written texts which have a similar genre as for example, reading advice columns in daily newspapers but which are from different cultures in order to compare if concerns and debates vary between cultures [11].

– The sentences of a cultural anecdote could be scrambled by the teacher and then learners could be requested to put the anecdote in sequence. This activity type is a useful one in order to help learners discern organizational issues in a given text [1].

All material gathered by the learners in the second stage of the project could serve as the basis to prepare additional activities that make learners develop in activating all competencies of the communicative competence construct. Word association activities where learners associate words in a given text to a given cultural topic could be helpful to promote learners' linguistic competence.

Writing skill. Activities such as tandem e-mail learning, designing stories and story continuation, among others, may develop writing skills with a particular emphasis on the intercultural component.

– *Tandem e-mail learning* has been regarded as an effective activity to promote cross-cultural dialogue while it is also a means of engaging learners in extended writing in a motivating way [2]. The idea is that two native speakers of different languages help each other to learn each other's language through the use of e-mail, communicating 50% of the time in each other's language. For in-class work, learners are requested to bring into the class the printed copy of all e-mail exchanges in order to prepare a brief report in which they synthesize how the topic discussed in the e-mail conversations is represented in the partners' culture. For such an activity, learners are encouraged to follow Kroll's [4] suggested sequence of steps from the setting of an assignment to the point at which the learners submit the complete text including preparation for the given task (here the re-reading of all e-mail exchanges), drafting and feedback, which may be repeated as many times as needed prior to submitting the final written work for evaluation.

– *Designing stories* is another activity type that could be used to promote learners' cultural imagination through writing. Here the teacher collects some magazines and first selects a variety of pictures that depict people in strange situations in the target culture, and then divides the class into small groups making each group responsible for describing what is happening in a particular picture.

At the end of the implementation stage, adult learners reflect on their experience and exchange opinions about the topics being dealt with in the project. This discussion encourages them to take an evaluative and critical position in relation to the cross-cultural awareness activities in which they have participated.

In this paper, and taking the intercultural competence as the point of departure, we have presented a sampling of activities in the four language skills for helping adult learners to communicate fluently and appropriately in the target language and culture. Although the four language skills have been presented separately for clarity purposes, the design of most activities has considered all the skills conjointly, consistent with how people interact with each other in real life. As a final remark therefore, we hope that the activities proposed in this article may help adult learners see language learning not merely as *language practice* but as a *communicative activity*.

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