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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AWARENESS
AS A MUST OF CONTEMPORARY FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Studied in the article is the problem of foreign language teachers' cross-cultural communication awareness. Analyzed are the requirements of the curriculum and the needs of contemporary teacher-trainees as potential intercultural mediators, the capacities of information and communication technologies as the means enabling cross-cultural communication, and the experience of participating in two ICT based Internet-projects. Conclusions are drawn as to cross-cultural communication awareness as a must of contemporary FL teachers and the most significant skills that the teacher-trainees should develop.

Key words: *cross-cultural communication awareness, prospective FL teachers, intercultural mediators, ICT based project, skills.*

The processes of escalation of globalization in economics, science and education, rapid development of information and communication technologies, internationalization of cross-cultural relations are not only beneficial for all the partners but also stir up conflicts in different spheres of human life. Having passed different paths in their historical development, with different cultures, traditions, customs and beliefs, peoples worked out certain rules which helped them to survive, feel safe and satisfy their needs. Cultural peculiarities formed their attitudes to many essential problems, created prejudices and stereotypes which built up barriers to tolerance, understanding and communication, and which may cause misunderstanding and conflicts. These conflicts could be easily evaded and even avoided if their initiators were familiarized with the basic cultural peculiarities of one another, learned to regard them with tolerance and respect, and were taught the most significant cross-cultural communication skills.

Cross-cultural communication has become one of the most burning issues of nowadays for, as Sophia Shang puts it, the world becomes smaller and smaller and the countries become more interdependent [12, p. 39]. Many scholars investigate different aspects of this phenomenon [1; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13]. We share Roseanne Tavares and Ildney Cavalcanti's viewpoint that "the development of people's cultural awareness leads us to more critical thinking as citizens with political and social understanding of our own and other communities" [13, p. 18].

Mutually beneficial interaction and collaboration presupposes a deep knowledge, trust, tolerance and respect of one another. Countries have to interact on the basis of cross-cultural communication laws and rules which are specific by nature and do not coincide with any of theirs. That is why teaching FL in linguistic universities nowadays should be directed not only to forming linguistic and professional competencies only but to molding the personality of a student as a whole – their awareness of similarities and differences in languages and cultures, their readiness to get a closer inkling of the other cultural values and respect them, their reaching the general level of human conscience, admitting the preference of common goals of mankind. In this context foreign language teachers' cross-cultural communication awareness is viewed as the key issue for they are going to become mediators between the target culture and that of their own.

Close study of the Curriculum for English language development in Universities and Institutes of Ukraine reveals that the socio-cultural component in it is given special significance and runs through the whole of it.

Among the aims we find the affective and social ones which state that while learning EL teacher-trainees should develop confidence as users and future teachers of the language, and foster positive attitudes and feelings towards the target language and the culture of the English-speaking world; facilitate and develop self-awareness and interpersonal skills that will enable them to function better in and outside the world of school [3, p. 22].

Among the objectives we also find those which cohere with cross-cultural communication awareness. They are: to demonstrate the ability to use English flexibly and effectively for other than professional and academic purposes; ability to deal with socio-cultural aspects of communication; sufficient insight into the cultures of English-speaking peoples to incorporate cultural information into their professional activities [3, p. 23].

In Chapter 5.6 of the Curriculum we read that in FL teaching and learning there are three interwoven components: language use, awareness of the nature of language, and understanding of foreign and native culture. Further we find the key statement "what is important for all the trainees is that they should understand possible differences between their own culture and that of others, and that they should develop their attitudes and acquire the means to cope with such differences" [3, p. 25].

Besides socio-cultural knowledge teacher trainees should acquire practical and intercultural skills. The latter include: the ability to bring the culture of origin and the foreign culture into relation with each other; cultural sensitivity and the ability to identify and use a variety of strategies for contact with those from other cultures; capacity to fulfill the role of cultural intermediary between one's own culture and the foreign culture and to deal effectively with intercultural misunderstanding and conflict situations [3, p. 27].

Thus, the undertaken analysis of the curriculum requirements proves of their full coincidence with the demands of contemporary world. Socio-cultural awareness of FL teacher-trainees can no longer be limited to their insight into historical, social and cultural background of the English speaking peoples only but extends to acquiring intercultural and trans-cultural awareness which recognizes the existence of other centers of identity. Students create

an insider's view of the target culture and can view their own culture more dispassionately. The final aim of the course is to introduce teacher-trainees to the experience of the 'strange' culture as the natural and normal world [3, p. 27].

Having the mentioned above in mind and with the belief that the best way to learn something is by doing it we decided to accept the invitation of our Russian colleagues and participate in two pilot cross-cultural projects initiated by the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies at M. Lomonosov Moscow State University. The projects were designed and implemented by a team of university teachers headed by Prof. Alla L. Nazarenko, Doctor of Philology, Head of Linguistics and Information Technologies Department. The team included Svitlana L. Bobyr, Candidate of Pedagogy, Head of Pedagogy and Methodology of FL Teaching Department at Chernihiv National Pedagogical University named after T. H. Shevchenko (Ukraine); Baktygul Z. Kurmanova, Doctor of Pedagogy, Head of Psychology and Pedagogy Department at Aktobe State University named after K. Zhubanov (Kazakhstan); Elena A. Malashenko, Director of the Language Centre, Head of Foreign Languages Department at the International University of Ecology named after A.D. Sakharov (Minsk, Belarus) and Mariam M. Ramazanova, Dagestan State University.

The themes of these cross-cultural projects were: "The traditions of hospitality" (April 2012) and "Family traditions and values yesterday and today: their reflection in folklore" (April 2013). Involved in the first project were the four countries: Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine. In the second there appeared one more participant – Dagestan.

The main goal of these projects was to arrange interaction of the educational institutions in those countries, to familiarize their students with the peculiarities of each other's cultures and national attitudes, to stir up interest in cross-cultural communication and develop some basic skills. The goal of the organizers of these projects was to observe and reveal the problems of cross-cultural communication that the students came across.

The choice of the countries was determined by some significant factors which we found appropriate to start with. They were:

– the common language – all the participants spoke Russian which was unlikely to cause any embarrassment;

– the common historical background – all were parts of the same country in the past and had similar experience, in case of some information gap the others could easily understand the speaker's intention;

– the same age range and status of the participants – all were the students of Humanities aged between 18 to 20;

– all used the same ICT and had approximately the same level of competence in operating them.

Although all the countries belonged to the same state formerly after the collapse of the Soviet Union the young people, born in independent states and separated by borders, have a vague idea of one another. This, we hoped, would be a good stimulus for their communication. Anyway, the logic of globalization presupposes their communication and interaction in various spheres for they are close neighbours.

The implementation of this project became possible due to modern ICT which allowed the participants, without moving anywhere, spending much time, effort or money, to run video conferences, get acquainted, exchange information on the suggested topics, ask questions and discuss various issues. The value of conducting these cross-cultural on-line projects is difficult to overestimate: their participants gained a precious experience which is being thoroughly studied and analyzed by the scholars [1; 2; 7; 11]. In this paper we are going to summarize the main results, and draw conclusions that might be of use for the others.

Since those were international telecommunication projects they required greater integration of knowledge, involving not only the study of the chosen topics (hospitality and family traditions) but also acquaintance with the partners' national cultures and attitudes. Students had to navigate through the information space, analyze the information obtained, select the appropriate one and decide on the most adequate ways of presenting it to their partners. They also had to think in advance over politically correct questions which would not cause any tension. Here we drew two conclusions:

1) students should be competent enough in the cultural background of their partners, lest they should get into a trap without ever noticing it simply because of their ignorance;

2) students should be well-educated in the cultural background of their own because cross-cultural communication surmises *exchange* of information, otherwise their partners should lose interest in them.

Hence the overall conclusion: students should get a profound cross-cultural knowledge of both target and host cultures.

It fully coincides with Tiina Matikainen and Carolyn B. Duffy's opinion that "the first step in being a good intercultural communicator is to know your own culture and to know yourself – in other words, to reflect thoughtfully on how you perceive things and how you act on those perceptions. Second, the more we know about the different cultural beliefs, values and attitudes of our global neighbors, the better prepared we will be to recognize and to understand the differences in their cultural behaviors" [7, p. 41].

The second conclusion that we have arrived at is connected with students' behavioral patterns. Good manners matter much for successful communication. That is why they should become the subject of a special concern when preparing students for cross-cultural communication. Students should not only be intelligent and well-bred, but tolerant, flexible, and open-hearted, be able to control their feelings and evade conflicts, respect the other's opinion even if it differs from theirs, and have a good sense of humor. Interaction with the representatives of other cultures imposes serious obligations on its participants. It is necessary to foresee the possible reaction of all the partners at the given information and take care that it should be positively received by all sides. The topics, touched upon, are to be of mutual interest. Negative stereotypes should be treated with irony, they should not dawn on the participants, and the students should be well aware of taboo questions not to make a blunder.

One more conclusion refers to the technical aspect of ICT based projects. Though conducting a telecommunication project is impossible without professional technical support participation in it requires a greater integration of knowledge in Humanities and Science on the part of its participants; it is aimed at developing their personality as a whole. Students should have sufficient knowledge in Science, be well instructed in IC technologies and have proper skills. This will enable them to cope with all the tasks they may choose to set – take pictures and make video clips, select and match the background music, dub it and make impressive presentations, upload their video-projects on YouTube, Wikispaces, Trueconf or any other platform etc.

Participation in ICT based cross-cultural projects meets contemporary students' expectations because they can apply their knowledge of computer technologies and their communicative skills to practice, to real life. Cross-cultural communication makes the world smaller and the peoples closer in students' perception. So, their responsibility for what they are doing grows immensely. They see the sense in the knowledge and skills they get in the university, hence their motivation to study foreign languages and cultures as well as computer technologies.

As the results of conducting the two cross-cultural Internet-projects show all their main goals were fully realized: the interaction of the educational institutions in Belarus, Dagestan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine was arranged; their students were familiarized with the peculiarities of each other's culture and national attitudes; teacher-trainees' interest in cross-cultural communication arose, and some basic skills mentioned above were developed.

The goal of the organizers of these projects to observe and reveal the most burning problems of cross-cultural communication that must be overcome in the future was achieved too. Below is a short list of such problems.

The first one is connected with some students' reluctance to discuss the cultural peculiarities of their own. They explained it by the lack of competency as they were the students of the English department and did not feel knowledgeable enough in the subject. Neither did they intend to study what they considered unnecessary. These students left the project at the very beginning. This fact, in our opinion, deserves a serious discussion as to what topics should be taught to the FL teacher-trainees in the context of globalization and what values should be cultivated in them.

The second was connected with the language of communication. As some students left the project new students appeared, and these were the students of the Ukrainian department. They worked at the project with great enthusiasm until the appointed date approached when they suddenly realized how imperfect their Russian was. Some felt really frustrated and the organizer had to reassure and support them neatly. Hence one more conclusion – the teacher should facilitate the process from the very beginning to its end, be sensitive to students' feelings and emotions and soothe them if necessary.

Direct communication via Skype and Trueconf also caused some problems. Being excited students spoke too fast and the sound signal was corrupt sometimes. In spite of the warning and even of some preliminary rehearsing their speech was indistinct. Hence another conclusion – articulation and intonation should be paid special attention to when preparing for ICT based cross-cultural communication.

In conclusion it is worthwhile accentuating that organization of ICT based cross-cultural projects is a powerful tool of developing cross-cultural communication awareness of prospective FL teachers. They promote a respectful attitude towards the diverse cultures of the contemporary world in the context of globalization, acquiring intercultural and trans-cultural awareness which is the final goal set by the Curriculum. Participation in such intercultural projects enhances the development of teacher-trainees' creativity, their ability to structure their knowledge and apply it when solving practical tasks, navigate through the information space and analyze the information obtained. But the most significant achievement of ours, in our opinion, is the students' desire to take part in new cross-cultural communication projects. This proves of our hypothesis that such projects meet the students' professional needs and expectations. Thus, cross-cultural communication awareness is a must of a contemporary foreign language teacher-trainee.

The problems of teaching foreign languages to teacher-trainees in the context of globalization mentioned in the article and the very phenomenon of conducting cross-cultural video conferences deserve further study.

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Бобир С. Л.

ОБІЗНАНІСТЬ В ОСОБЛИВОСТЯХ МІЖКУЛЬТУРНОГО СПІЛКУВАННЯ ЯК НЕВІД′ЄМНА РИСА СУЧАСНИХ УЧИТЕЛІВ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ

У статті розглядається проблема обізнаності в особливостях міжкультурного спілкування сучасних учителів іноземних мов. Аналізуються вимоги програми та потреби майбутніх учителів як потенційних міжкультурних посередників, можливості інформаційно-комунікаційних технологій як засобів реалізації міжкультурного спілкування, а також досвід участі студентів мовного вишу в двох Інтернет-проектах. Робляться висновки щодо обізнаності в особливостях міжкультурного спілкування як невід'ємної риси сучасного вчителя іноземних мов і найсуттєвіших умінь, яких він має набути під час навчання у виші.

Ключові слова: обізнаність в особливостях міжкультурного спілкування, майбутні вчителі іноземних мов, міжкультурні посередники, Інтернет-проект, уміння.

Бобырь С. Л.

ОСВЕДОМЛЕННОСТЬ В ОСОБЕННОСТЯХ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОГО ОБЩЕНИЯ КАК НЕОТЪЕМЛЕМАЯ ЧЕРТА СОВРЕМЕННЫХ ПРЕПОДАВАТЕЛЕЙ ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКОВ

В статье рассматривается проблема осведомленности в особенностях межкультурного общения современных учителей иностранных языков. Анализируются требования программы и потребности будущих учителей как потенциальных межкультурных посредников, возможности информационно-коммуникационных технологий как средств реализации межкультурного общения, а также опыт участия студентов языкового вуза в двух Интернет-проектах. Делаются выводы об осведомленности в особенностях межкультурного общения как неотъемлемой черте современного учителя иностранных языков и об основных умениях, которыми он должен овладеть во время обучения в вузе.

Ключевые слова: осведомленность в особенностях межкультурного общения, будущие учителя иностранных языков, межкультурные посредники, Интернет-проект, умения.