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INTEGRATING CULTURE INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

ИНТЕГРАЦИЯ КУЛЬТУРЫ В ПРЕПОДАВАНИИ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА

Abstract. This article is about integrating culture into foreign language teaching and some reasons, some approaches to teaching culture.

Key phrases: Sociocultural norms, assumptions, a “facts only” approach, a frame of reference, a culture capsule, culture clusters, intercultural connections, culture assimilations, culture mini-dramas, strategies, techniques.

Nowadays nobody denies the necessity of teaching a language as part of foreign culture and studying the target culture through the language. Research publications on the problem of teaching for cultural understanding have been written by many Ukrainian, Russian, European, and American educators. A number of TESOL and IATEFL publications also deal with a cultural component of language teaching. Why is this so? The reasons for that might be the following:

- Educators, language teachers and methodologists realize that language and culture are intertwined. As an American scholar in the field of methodology, Douglas Brown, has said, “Whenever we teach a language we also teach a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling and acting.”
- Language teachers are becoming dissatisfied with purely functional uses of language.
- Educators realize that the mere learning of linguistic system is no guarantee of successful cross-cultural communication.
- More and more educators and students have come to recognize the importance of valuing other cultures in the world beyond their own borders.
- An increasing number of businesses are recognizing that investment in learning about other languages and cultures can bring significant economic and technological advances.
- Language and culture study can help reduce ethnocentrism.

- There is no question that global understanding ought to be a mandatory component of basic education.

The problems in the teaching of culture: The teaching of culture has been advocated for many years. But cultural teaching is still unsubstantial and random in most language classrooms. Educators maintain that culture is still the weakest component of most curricula. Some of the reasons for that are the following:

- Some teachers have not been trained in the teaching of culture and, therefore, do not know how to integrate culture into language teaching.
- Teachers lack significant first-hand knowledge of the country they teach.
- The study of culture involves time that many school teachers and university instructors cannot spare in an already overcrowded curriculum.
- Cultural materials receive uneven treatment in textbooks.
- Good quality authentic materials are lacking.
- Teachers often think that students will be exposed to cultural materials later. But “later” never seems to come for most students.
- The definition of culture can be the source of the difficulty.

Approaches to teaching culture: Different approaches to teaching for cultural understanding have been designed by researchers, methodologists, and foreign language teachers. Most of them believe that the objectives that are to be achieved in cross-cultural understanding

involve processes rather than facts. “Facts are meaningless until interpreted within a problem-solving context”. The goal of the “facts only” approach is just to collect bits of information. This approach seems to be ineffective for several reasons.

Firstly, facts are in a state of continual change, they are not settled, especially when they relate to current lifestyle. Specific data may not be true across time.

Secondly, a “facts only” approach to culture may establish stereotypes rather than decrease them. This approach does not give us an explanation or reason for cultural variation.

Thirdly, gathering facts in great amounts leave students unprepared when they face cultural situations not previously studied.

Students often approach target-culture phenomena assuming that the new patterns of behavior can be understood within the framework of their own native culture. When cultural phenomena differ from what they expect, students may react negatively, characterizing the target culture as “strange” or “weird” or even not acceptable. An American linguist, Corinne Mantle-Bromley, compares the assumption of equivalence between cultural systems to a similar assumption of equivalence between linguistic systems.

According to the latter assumption, for every word in the mother tongue there is an exact equivalent in the target language. By the way, this is what many people who don't speak any foreign language assume. Those who believe this assumption think that in order to speak a foreign language one simply substitutes foreign language words for native language words, using the same syntactic pattern and the same word order.

Professor Vicki Galloway, the 2002 recipient of the international Nelson Brooks Award for the Teaching of Culture, stressed the importance of recognizing the dangers of projecting one's native frame of reference on that of the culture being studied.

She said that to understand another culture, one must construct “a new frame of reference in terms of the people who created it”. She also explained that the process of constructing an appropriate frame of reference is complicated by the fact that cultures have functions and forms. By functions she meant needs, purposes, meanings; by forms — manifestations, realizations, operations. Both functions and forms vary very much, not only across cultures but also within the subcultures of a society. For example, a function such as the need for shelter or accommodation is universal. But the ways in which that need is defined, prioritized, and met in different societies can be diverse.

How can we then help students construct a new frame of reference based in the target culture? Galloway recom-

mends that students begin with an understanding of their own frame of reference, and then, with teacher guidance, explore the target culture through authentic texts and materials.

Suggestions for achieving the integration of culture into foreign language teaching: The suggestions are the following:

- A “facts only” approach should be avoided.
- Cultural topics should be presented in conjunction with units' themes
- Cultural information should be used while teaching vocabulary.
- Cultural contexts should be used for a number of oral communicative activities.
- Cultural activities should be planned and prepared very carefully.
- A variety of techniques for teaching culture that involve listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills should be used.
- Photos, pictures, textbook illustrations, newspaper advertisements, cartoons, objects, artifacts, and other cultural material should be used.
- Small-group techniques, such as role-plays, dramas, discussions, etc should be used.
- Discuss cross-cultural differences with your students, emphasizing that no culture is “better” than another and that cross-cultural understanding is an important facet of learning a language.

Techniques for Teaching Culture: A culture capsule is a short description — one or two paragraphs in length — of one minimal difference between a British and a target-culture custom, accompanied by pictures, photos, slides, or objects. In the classroom students can perform role-plays based on the capsule.

Culture assimilators may consist of as many as 10 to 100 “critical incidents” or episodes that take place between a British and a member of the target culture in which some type of conflict or misunderstanding develops. The source of conflict on the part of the British is the lack of an appropriate cultural framework for understanding the incident.

Culture mini-dramas can be constructed from three to five episodes in which a cultural conflict occurs. As each episode is experienced, students try to explain what the source of the miscommunication is through class discussion, led by the teacher.

After each episode in the series, more cultural information is given, but not enough to understand the cause of the problem, which only becomes apparent in the last scene. This activity helps students see how they might easily jump to false conclusions about the people in the target culture because they are responding and reacting because of their own ethnocentric biases and perceptions.

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