

COGNITIVE READINESS FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract. The article deals with the implementation of cross-cultural oriented training to higher vocational school language education. The necessity of a student's cognitive personality development in the process of intercultural competence formation is discussed. The intercultural competence structure that includes three levels of parameters (the level of the basic parameters, the level of key parameters, the level of cognitive parameters), necessary for effective cross-cultural interaction, is presented. The notion of "cognitive readiness for intercultural communication", which is, to authors' opinion, crucial for the productivity of intercultural communication is introduced. It consists in conscious attitude to intercultural communication as the process of the world cognition, its goals and objectives, process and outcomes. The stages of the educational process aimed at integrated development of communicative skills of intercultural communication and cognitive readiness for intercultural communication are described. They provide the integrated development of different cognitive strategies as part of communicative language teaching. The examples of exercises that help implement cognitive orientation of training into the development of students' communicative skills within one lexical and grammatical topic are proposed. Pedagogical conditions to be created in the educational process are referred. These include: 1) polymodality of students' perceptual experience; 2) multiaspectiveness of communicative exercises that allows combining different cognitive strategies; 3) a specific sequence of exercises; 4) the dominance of group work activities that provides students with the opportunity to solve communicative tasks in collaboration, integrating various strategies of perception, processing and interpretation of foreign language information.

Keywords: intercultural competence; cognitive readiness for intercultural communication; information processing strategies; cognitive parameters.

Introduction

Intercultural orientation of language education is one of the up-to-date requirements, caused by globalization and multiculturalism. Intercultural paradigm, "which has become the ontology of a modern education" [1: 52], as far as foreign language education is concerned, has been developed within the framework of an intercultural approach (N.I. Almazova, S.G. Ter-Minasova, P.V. Sysoev, V.V. Safonova, V.P. Furmanova et al.), which is "based on the study of how behavioral traits of different cultures identified in the course of cross-cultural and socio-cultural studies affect the interaction of individuals as the bearers of these cultures" [2: 211]. According to P.V. Sysoev, "at the present stage language education performs as the pro-

cess of acquiring knowledge about the cultural diversity of the world, the language spoken, and the relationship between cultures in the modern multicultural world, as well as the formation of active stance towards life and the ability to interact with people from different cultures and countries according to the principle of the dialogue of cultures” [3: 7].

The principle of intercultural dialogue as an attribute of language education is a common approach to the teaching materials development and languages and cultures training, in which the greatest importance is given to not what students will learn and what intercultural interaction skills they will obtain during language and cultural knowledge acquisition. According to P.V. Sysoev, “learning language from the perspective of the dialogue of cultures is considered effective if due to comparing and contrasting cultural phenomena the students will learn: to see not only the differences but also similarities between their own and a foreign culture; to perceive differences as a standard attribute of coexistence of different cultures in the modern world; to form a proactive stance directed against cultural inequality, discrimination and vandalism” [Ibid: 37].

Intercultural communication

It is in the dialogue of cultures the cognitive skills of understanding own culture and other cultures are developed. The dialogue of cultures can develop only on the ground of cultural relativism, which is the basis for effective cooperation. Cultural relativism is based on the idea that the behavior of each person in the intercultural environment cannot be interpreted according to any standard; it should be interpreted only in terms of a particular situation. Thus, the cultural differences are acknowledged, but not assessed, since different types of cultural behavior should be assessed and understood only in terms of a specific socio-cultural situation. Relativism recognizes “the need for people to belong to different cultures, but it is required to respect not only themselves but also others” [4: 18].

Awareness of otherness, according to M. Bennett, begins “with the recognition of cultural differences as a necessary condition” [5: 249]. Initially linguistic and nonverbal differences are realized, finally value differences are realised. In turn, this helps to adapt to a different culture, which “begins with empathy and ends with the formation of pluralism, the essence of which lies not so much in recognizing cultural differences, but in a more adequate understanding of the specific situations of intercultural communication” [4: 19]. Thus, the teaching of foreign languages on the basis of the dialogue of cultures is intended to ensure the adequacy of understanding between speakers of different linguocultures in intercultural communication, which is determined by the degree of coincidence of their mental images [1: 71]. Consequently, one of the conditions for the effective cross-cultural interaction is *the*

ability to recognize and analyze the communicants intercultural differences, which requires a certain personality traits such as tolerance to different views on life, to another personal experience, to other norms and cultural beliefs as well as empathy, respect for cultural traditions and behavioral differences, the ability to communicate adequately in a foreign language and so on. Having the mental images of own and other cultures, a person should be able to reflect on the difference between these images and then incorporate them into intercultural communication.

Thus, the system of language education and the methodology of foreign language teaching in terms of higher vocational school aims to develop students' abilities and personal qualities needed to achieve mutual understanding and effective communication with the representatives of the studied foreign language culture. A new conceptual model of language education advocates discursive synergetic model, which takes into account the fact that teaching a foreign language is "the complex process of knowledge acquisition, revealing the implication of interpersonal communication, the acquisition of lexical and syntactic rules, mastering the socio-cultural skills of language communication" [6: 94]. Intercultural orientation of the communication in a foreign language teaching will consist in teaching students the conceptual system, world view and values of native speakers; shortening of cross-cultural distance, teaching them to adapt and to affect other cultures and other cultural environment in order to develop an optimal strategy for cooperation and communication in a foreign language [7: 184]. The introduction of intercultural aspects of professional activities into teaching foreign language to future specialists allows organizing training with respect to the specific traits of intercultural interaction, developing communicative skills and the ability to solve professional problems adequately specified characteristics of intercultural communication. All these requires a fundamentally new content of the educational process that brings about changes both in area of knowledge students should acquire and methods of teaching.

In this respect the formation of such a level of intercultural competence that allows the individual to "go beyond" his values and ideas and become an active participant of intercultural communication becomes the urgent objective of a modern foreign language education at the university. Therefore we consider it appropriate to interpret intercultural competence in this article as an integrative quality of a person, characterized by a set of communicative and cognitive resources, and expressed as certain knowledge, skills and abilities that allow him to be an effective participant in cross-cultural communication. This quality is formed within specific psychological pedagogical conditions created by the teacher in the training process. The development of intercultural communication skills should be aimed not only at mastering the skills that ensure adequate perception, interpretation and production of foreign-language texts, responsible for the success of the interaction on the ground of the understanding of communicative behavior and promoting ade-

quate psychological perception of the communication partner, but also at the development of individual's cognitive parameters accumulated in the process of acquiring personal experience when dealing with communication problems in a cross-cultural interaction, which help student to lower the level of uncertainty, to adapt to new reality and enable mutual cognition. These parameters relate to the individual's ability and thus can be formed in a properly organized teaching process.

Cognitive readiness to intercultural communication

The necessity to develop the student's personality on the above parameters requires the formation of a particular personal quality that characterizes value-conscious attitude to intercultural communication as a way of learning about the world, its goals and objectives, process and outcomes. In this respect, we believe it is necessary to introduce the concept of *cognitive readiness* for intercultural communication, which reflects the cognitive abilities of an individual to interact in terms of intercultural dialogue. It seems to us that this quality of an individual is a prerequisite for the successful intercultural competence formation. Cognitive readiness for intercultural communication is manifested in various fields of intercultural communication and performs a precondition and index of personal development.

The introduction of the concept of cognitive readiness for intercultural communication requires us to specify the components of intercultural competence as a set of skills underlying the effective intercultural communication that perform substantive and procedural content of teaching. In accordance with the requirements to the quality of foreign language proficiency level, assigned in state standards and normative documents [8], we distinguish three levels of parameters, ranked according to the degree of development priority in the teaching foreign language process based on intercultural paradigm (Table).

The *first* level includes basic parameters, which provide productive communicative behavior in a foreign language communication within the socio-cultural context.

The *second* level includes key parameters that should be added to the parameters of communicative skills, language, and some range of socio-cultural knowledge of the language spoken, a psychological readiness of students to participate in intercultural communication. The parameters of the second level are the intercultural-directed since they add intercultural component that transforms the parameters of the first level and brings them to the cross-cultural environment of foreign language communication.

The *third* is the level of cognitive parameters that constitute the concept of cognitive readiness for intercultural communication, which serves a cognitive-psychological basis for effective cross-cultural interaction and a

springboard for finding ways to optimize active learning of students, including metacognition.

Intercultural communication skills

The level of basic parameters:
ability to produce and interpret a text in a foreign language;
ability to communicate according to the norms accepted in a foreign language;
ability to interact and reach mutual understanding
The level of key parameters:
ability to identify, perceive, interpret, analyze and compare cultural phenomena of both own and foreign cultures;
ability to communicate with respect to cultural values;
ability to accept and respect a foreign culture without prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination
The level of cognitive parameters:
maturity of cognitive processes responsible for successful performance in unusual conditions;
ability to manage and vary own communicative behavior;
conscious communicative behavior and adequate choice of information processing strategies according to the communicative situation;
openness towards other culture cognition and psychological, social and intercultural differences perception

The development of cognitive readiness for intercultural communication requires special organization of educational process, which will be aimed at both the development of communicative abilities of students, and the abilities of students apply different groups of strategies to process information: modes of perception and foreign language information organization; strategies of analysis and foreign language information processing; methods of objective interpretation and critical evaluation from the perspective of intercultural dialogue.

Implications to EFL teaching

Basing on the steps of the communicative competence development, adopted in modern methodology [9: 119] we find it necessary to provide sequential development of different information processing strategies at orientation, operational and creative stages.

Orientation stage correlates with the step of introduction and situational mastering of linguistic units and socio-cultural aspects of communication. From the perspective of cognitive readiness development the emphasis is put on the strategies of conceptualization, responsible for the perception and ordering of linguistic units in learners' cognitive structure and the development of their conceptual framework. Since in educational process the strategies perform as methods and techniques students apply to solve communicative tasks at this stage a teacher should provide a variation of activi-

ties requiring categorization, classification, generalization, systematization, contextual guess, making correlations, as well as strategies underlying such perceptual processes as the feature selection and identification. Consequently, the emphasis should be put on such activities as creating mind-maps, grouping, giving definitions, understanding and developing tables, charts, diagrams, finding similarities etc. Conceptualizing of a new material in a foreign language can also be achieved by establishing associative bonds which allows to link new concepts to students' existing knowledge and their personal experience.

Operational stage is concerned with practicing new material in different situations of intercultural communication in which students use new information in different contexts while performing different communicative tasks. At this stage the focus is on the ways of information processing and analyzing. In other words, the purpose of this stage is to gain experience of performing in different communicative situations, applying different strategies of information processing. Therefore, in terms of the development of cognitive readiness for intercultural communication an emphasis is put on the development of such strategies as synthesizing, analyzing and inference based on a set of activities aimed at establishing logical links, contrasting, making comparisons, looking for relevant information, drawing conclusions and inferences through logical induction and deduction.

Creative stage corresponds to the fluent use of the acquired material in new situations. It is aimed at developing strategies of critical evaluation and objective interpretation of new foreign language information from the perspective of intercultural dialogue. At this stage the emphasis is put on hypothetical and problematic situations that encourage students to critically assess cultural differences based on objectivity and understanding that "different" does not mean better or worse. Problematic nature of tasks allows a teacher to develop tolerance to unrealistic experience, based on the acceptance of the information that is consistent with the existing knowledge and beliefs. This task is very difficult for students with intrinsic intolerance to unrealistic experience, but to overcome this inconvenience is essential for the success of intercultural communication, in which the ability to accept and understand new and extraneous information plays the key role. Hypothetical or imaginary situations, in which a student can use his imagination and feelings, develop emotional thinking and sensory affective way of encoding information. They are aimed at developing skills to express their emotions in the way that doesn't offend wittingly or unwittingly the feelings of others. At this stage it is also important to provide the conditions for the integrated application of various cognitive strategies in solving one problem. To achieve this goal a group project can be used as it brings together the efforts of several students in the group with different cognitive styles, ensures

their cooperation, creates a situation of choice for each student in the allocation of responsibilities.

Thus the teacher should provide gradual actualization of all the strategies and skills essential for intercultural communication. In the course of training organized according to the stages stated above a student masters not only communicative skills but also acquires ability to manage his communicative behavior within intercultural communication. Cognitive readiness for intercultural communication implies that students have certain skills that can be described as task-oriented, productive, and integrative. It determines both the operational level of a student's cognitive sphere and emotional sphere responsible for his psychological readiness to interact with people from another culture, enrich his world view with accepting other norms, cultural values, traditions, to overcome stereotypes, etc.

The teacher organizes training according to the stages with the help of communicative tasks various in the format and form that are aimed at practicing the same kind of vocabulary, grammar and cultural material from different perspectives thus allowing teacher to implement the principles of individualization and differentiation within common learning environment. The diversity of the strategies involved is provided with different learning conditions. Various tasks imply different strategies necessary to perform communicative task. Students perform reading, listening, speaking tasks (to prepare a monologue, to discuss, to debate) that require different ways to process information.

Conclusion

Thus, the development of cognitive readiness for intercultural communication is realized by such an organization of educational process in which:

1. The same new material is presented in different ways and with regard to different modalities of perceptual experience. For example, if the communicative situation is preceded by a printed text that gives students an idea about the features of this or that aspect of the culture of the target language and demonstrates the contextual use of other cultures and concepts of foreign language, the perception should be enhanced with visual aids or organograms. New sociocultural material may be introduced with the help of video, visual aids with the help of illustrations, as well as, if possible, with the help of objects associated with cultural realities of the country into consideration, the use of which helps to activate students' kinesthetic memory, as well as subject-practical and sensory-emotional styles of encoding information.

2. Multiaspectiveness of communicative exercises, which allow combining different cognitive strategies, is provided.

3. A specific sequence of exercises, which involve various strategies responsible for the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication, is provided with the help of: 1) the relevant communicative tasks instruction; 2) discursive introducing of a situation to the students; 3) methodological aids.

4. The dominance of group work activities that provides students with the opportunity to solve communicative tasks in collaboration, integrating various strategies of perception, processing and interpretation of foreign language information.

So, since the efficiency of communication between people from different cultures is largely determined by national mentalities of the communicants based on their cognitive and conceptual systems, intercultural orientation of the teaching process is closely connected with the problem of students' cognitive development within the foreign language learning at higher vocational school and involves the development of the worldview by means of a foreign language. The inclusion of cognitive component in the process of a foreign language learning gives students an idea about the culture of interpersonal and intercultural communication as a complex system, the awareness of the features of culture and language of the people, enhances their world view. This determines the specific content of a foreign language teaching process and a set of competencies required for successful cross-cultural communication, which aims to develop the range of skills at three levels: the level of basic parameters, the level of key parameters, the level of cognitive parameters.

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