THEORY AND METHODOLOGY OF TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

UDC 372.881.111.1
DOI: 10.17223/24109266/8/11

CULTURAL IDENTITY AS A PROBLEM OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

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Abstract. The article considers the problem of the learner's cultural identity in acquiring a foreign language. An attempt is made to prove the relevance of this problem to the ongoing period of neoglobalization of languages and cultures. The research encompasses a theoretical analysis of the "third culture" phenomenon combined with the studies of cultural identity of English language learners, including an opinion poll among Russian students of English. The article concludes with the idea that cultural identity in English language teaching can be viewed as an intrapersonal process. Cultural identity can serve the purpose of training students to exercise tolerance for other cultures across diversities and differences.
Keywords: culture; cultural identity; globalization; anti-globalization; global English; the phenomenon of the "third culture"; native speakers and culture bearers.

Introduction

Cultural identity is an individual's awareness of oneself as the bearer of certain culturally marked traits, which becomes ever more realized amidst cultural diversity. Identity is deeply hidden and intimate process of integrating oneself with culturally alien environment and achieving the integrity of the native and non-native norms, values and stereotypes. In this sense, identity is the way towards self-reconciliation of the "nativeness" with the "otherness" [1].

Thus, cultural identity is not only a state of personal mentality but also a process resembling the "tug-of-war" when individuals find themselves between the two or among more cultures making the much needed choice to self-identify and to belong.

If the choice is made in favor of the target foreign culture, individuals acquire the necessary consistency in behavior.

In the case of retaining one's allegiance to the home culture, cultural identity is an important psychological prerequisite to remain the "rightful

owner" of one's native culture and a "welcomed" guest in the foreign environment. Self-identity in the non-native society is also important for the psychological health of an individual, because "wandering between cultures" can be seen as a cultural split personality syndrome.

It's cultural identity, but not attempts to fit in the others' cultural practices that accounts for success in adapting to a non-native social environment. Seeking one's own cultural identity is relevant not only in the field of multicultural world, but also in the language classroom, where native culture bearers get into active contact with the target step-culture.

Methodology

The study was based on the generally accepted concept of an individual's cultural identity. The specificity was seen in the idea of the "third culture" [2], the role of the nearest cultural context available in language learning [3], the impact of globalization on cultural self-perception [4]. The method of analyzing worldviews in Russia's English language learners was also applied. With the help of opinion poll the perception of cultural self-identity in English language learning was studied among students at Tambov State Technical University.

Results and discussion

"Third Culture" in the cultural identity of pupils

The study of cultural identity of pupils is known in language teaching pedagogy as the problem of a "child with a third culture" (Third Culture Kid - TCK) [2].

The "Third Culture" of students in many ways develops not only in real contact with other cultures, but also during the English language classroom. This process is under the influence not only on the part of teachers and class peers. Essential impact comes from the family, parents and social environment. It is noteworthy that parents often voice their concern over their children starting to absorb other people's worldview and values during their English language lessons and this phenomenon goes far beyond Russia's educational environment observable in many other cultures across the globe.

Typically parents who want their children to learn English, want them to get acquainted with other cultures keeping their native cultural identity. This phenomenon is being increasingly observed in Russia with a growing sense of belonging to "one's roots". A very illustrative in this sense, is the celebration of Christmas during the English language lessons in the British tradition. Quite a few parents in our own experience have expressed doubt whether it is appropriate to celebrate this holiday in the British way on the Russian soil.

The methodology of teaching is also considered a culturally marked practice with the distinction made between teaching "their way" and "our way". One of such teaching areas is the instruction of grammar regarding the choice of material, the succession of presentation, the teaching techniques and the weight of importance given to it. Russian national pedagogy is often viewed as an important indicator of the teacher's cultural identity and allegiance.

Another important indicator of one's cultural identity is the phenomenon of Global English or rather the choice of one of the "Englishes".

The cultural function of the global English language in the modern world

In contrast to "King's/Queen's English" there emerges Global English owned by the English speaking community at large and belonging to different cultures both big and small. Received Pronunciation has already become a thing of the past even on the British Isles, limited to a professional community of BBC presenters while English is spoken in a great variety of local accents.

The role of global English is growing, allowing people to:

- establish intercultural contacts on a global scale;
- achieve pragmatic goals making oneself understood and heard;
- understand the multitude of different accents typical of "Englishes";
- "to switch codes" embedding elements of English in one's mother tongue and inserting elements of native language in the English speech;
- confidently demonstrate one's own cultural identity through the vehicle of English [1].

It's the communicative reality that prompts the need to teach students to understand not only the Standard English pronunciation but also develop readiness to deal effectively with non-standard accents [5].

Thus, the multiple function of Global English has already emerged vividly *symbolizing* the cultural diversity of the world, effectively *serving* the purpose of intercultural communication and assertively *publishing* one's cultural identity.

These functions mark neoglobalization.

Cultural identity of the individual in the process of neoglobalization

Theoretical research has shown that the study of students' cultural identity will be more productive if we take into account the period of "neoglobalization", which replaced the relatively short time when the spread of the English language and culture went on uncontested with the domineering values of the "inner circle" (UK, USA etc.).

Neoglobalization shows not only the spread of English language and culture, but also the growing national self-awareness of people in the "outer" and "expanding" circle where English is either firmly established or is in

growing demand. The English language which once served as a social tool to distinguish a Brit from a foreigner has subsequently turned into a convenient instrument of an individual's cultural self-assertion owned by diverse ethnic communities of the world.

Under these conditions, the task to train and educate English language learners with the distinct cultural identity and ability to successfully navigate between cultures, is becoming truly relevant [4].

Another important trend of neoglobalization is the silent claim coming from Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and some other languages to get the status of a "global" language [6] the reason being migration and formation of cultural diasporas and enclaves all over the globe.

Impact on the classroom

The interaction and blend of cultural norms, values, stereotypes, beliefs and bans takes place not only in the real world but also in the language classroom where learning environment is the arena of both transfer and clash of cultures [7].

Observations in Russia's language classrooms show that the tendency to teach English spoken "as in England" is still considered ideal by some teachers lacking first-hand knowledge of the linguistic reality on the British Isles with an apparent variety of ethnic norms. At the same time, "travellers' tales" spread the word reaching classrooms in Russia that English in England is not spoken as it is taught in class, forgetting about Northumberland Geordie which is beyond understanding, and saying nothing about English in Scotland and Northern Ireland. This begs the question of what kind of English should be taught for better communication with the real world.

In view of the "proper English" problem the preference traditionally given to the "correct English" is being questioned and contested alongside with the growing interest in the native speaker's worldviews reflecting the whole cultural map of the world [8].

This trend alongside with the tendency to view oneself as belonging to one's own culture has become noticeable not only in Russia but also in European countries, including the UK, France, Greece, Spain, but also in Russia, China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and others. This is the most essential feature of neoglobalization. Globalization of English that was once regarded as a threat to cultural identity has turned out to be its booster. Resistance to alien interference has once again proved to be alive and kicking.

Cultural identity in students

Studies have shown that contact with another culture leads to both negative and positive changes in the learner's cultural identity and ability to adapt to a different social setting. On the positive pole these changes are:

- enhanced flexibility in finding bearings in a different social environment;
- increased ability to get an insight into a different culture.

On the negative pole the changes are:

- losing the ability with the time to understand one's native culture;
- wavering between the non- and native culture;
- experiencing inner conflict of cultures.

This dynamics results in the productive, additive, subtractive, non-productive and split change in the learner's cultural identity. Zero change with little or no effect is also possible [3].

Studies demonstrate that the most important factor having an impact on cultural identity of individuals is not immersion in a culture per se, but a "foreign friend". Socializing with friends and acquaintances facilitates culture acquisition, makes a person more self-confident abroad [9]. Importantly, interest of foreign friends in the individual's native culture contributes to the sense of belonging and retention of cultural identity.

Teachers' response

In some countries, such as China, where national cultural identity is noticeably felt, English teachers' voices are heard expressing their concern about the initiation of students into English and culture, leading to potential loss of Confucian traditions in education. Some teachers protest against students' increased self-confidence which is alien to the Chinese educational traditions.

Interestingly, early English learning cuts the likelihood of a cultural "split" and increases the chances that learners' native culture will dominate. [10: 2005] The analogy can be found in Japan with the typical "Japanization" of education [11] and other countries of the region [9].

Opinion poll among Russian students

In order to study the process of identifying with a foreign culture a survey was conducted among students at Tambov State Technical University (Russia). The students were asked to complete the given statement with the suggested options:

Contact with foreign culture in my English language studies:

1) expands my intercultural horizons;
2) teaches me adequate strategies of behavior;
3) gives me a positive image of target countries and cultures;
4) generates inner conflict between my native and learned culture;
5) has "zero" impact on my;
6) gives rise to mixed feelings.
7) requires increased tolerance in perceiving foreign cultures.

Responses were obtained from 150 students at Tambov State Technical University (Russia). The distribution of responses (%) is shown on the histogram (Fig. 1). Each participant could choose more than one answer.

Distribution of answers to the teachers on the impact of the culture of countries where English is common language in outlook, behavior, attitude

As shown on the histogram, many students believe that discovering the culture of English-speaking countries beyond the inner circle of the UK and USA expands their horizons and learn different strategies of behavior. Students' responses about positive image of English culture were mixed.

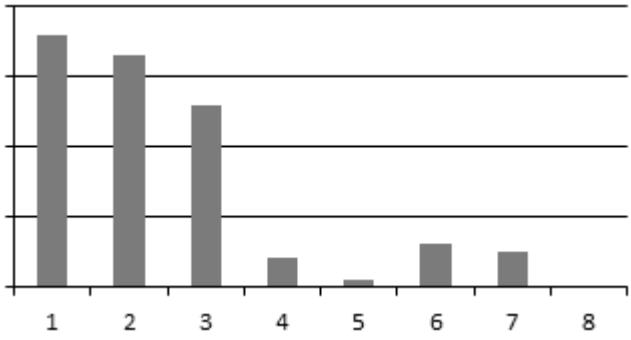


Fig. 1

It is noteworthy that quite a few students mentioned mixed feeling and the need to exercise tolerance towards English speaking communities and their cultural practices. These indications can be interpreted as natural process of searching for one's cultural identity and position in the modern multicultural world. The guarded attitude towards some indications of English-associated cultures means that Russian students have now entered the reality of the world that can be harsh at times and are becoming part of international community with diverse attitudes and mixed feelings. This proves once again the relevance of moving cultural component of curriculum from the curriculum backdrop to the forefront and ascribing to it the role of "second grammar" much needed for successful communication [12].

Conclusion

Cultural identity of the English language learner is a novel issue that has become relevant in the process of neoglobalization and, the growing search for self-identity in large and small nations. The process of establishing cultural identity is natural and is always activated in the situation of cultural diversity and the need to belong. The task of developing in Russia's learners of English their national self-identity is explicitly set in the Federal

State Educational Standard in Russia starting with the primary school and into higher education. The goal is set to develop in Russia's English language learners their national and civic identity with awareness of themselves as bearers of Russian culture. The achievement of this goal matched with the increased ability of native culture bearers to adapt successfully to the non-native cultural environment on the principles of tolerance and interaction, is both timely and worthwhile the pedagogical effort.

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Resived 02.09.2016.

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