

STUDIES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Success in modern academic and professional careers is unarguably and closely related to individual's foreign language competence. Moreover, with the introduction of Bologna Declaration and creation of a common European space for higher education, foreign language studies gained greater importance and became an inevitable necessity for an individual. Simultaneously, the status of the foreign language is undergoing changes: instead of a narrow specific linguistic study object, it turns into a tool for other non-linguistic subject studies, an instrument for communication in foreign language environment. It stands obvious that foreign language mastery leads to and results in successful socialization of a person living and studying at home or away, gives a positive impact on the life quality and integration into European society individually and as a community.

English is the foreign language mostly widely spread at secondary school and later chosen for improvement at institutions of tertiary education. This is a world-wide acknowledged language bearing an international status, the popularity of which is characterised by the number of English and bilingually speaking countries where English is one of state official languages. In addition, the frequent use of English in intellectual, economical, commercial, and cultural aspects of life round the world cannot be overrated. It is the language of international organisations, pop culture, international tourism, publishing, info communications, and finally, education [4]. German and French could also be ascribed to international languages because of the considerably large number of language speakers, if not on the world scale then within the European Union [3].

A foreign language being an international one cannot be identified as British English, Australian English, or German spoken in Germany by native speakers. An international language, however, is denationalised linguistically and internationalised culturally, rejecting specific lexical, grammatical, and phonological faculties peculiar to a single certain language, moreover, without Anglo-centrism in the socio-cultural aspect [4].

International English maintains specific relations with the cultural reference material for studies and the very studies are different from the ones typical to the traditional ethno-cultural language teaching principle. International English is a language, which bears no similarities to an elite *lingua franca*, and is used in communication of people representing various cultures and social groups. So, in spite of this fact, the cultural context cannot be limited to the studies of one or a few English speaking countries social and cultural life. Hence, the cultural discourse implemented in the international language studies should suggest the information of three types at equal proportions:

- Source or native cultural material;
- Cultural material of the target language speaking country;
- Cultural material of world countries speaking non-target language or speaking bilingually [4].

On the other hand, the cultural discourse stands inseparable in teaching and learning an international language as it carries a double function – semantic, suggesting meaningful information, and motivating, supplying language use processes with a stimulus. Consequently, the cultural material selection can be accompanied by certain danger such as globalisation of world cultures and changes in the national identity. Multicultural, multiethnic modern British society experiencing life style homogenisation processes in various spheres cannot be longer related to the traditional stereotypes of British cuisine of tea, cucumber scones, roast beef, or fat puddings because of the information invalidity. Instead of stereotypical interpretation of the world culture, a number of new common values and burning issues have come onto the stage: tolerance to those

who are different, movement against global terrorism, ecological agriculture, global climate warming, hazardous genetically modified food products, cloning of a human being, etc. [5].

Reflection of intercultural similarities and differences is the essential point the studies of international foreign languages are based on. The relation between a language and culture is possible to describe by the following assumptions:

- Cultural realities of a target language should not be accepted by the learners as obligatory norms;
- An international language is “denationalised” and is not related to any actual nation or culture;
- Academic goals in language teaching and learning are focused on the development of the learner’s ability to communicate with representatives of various cultures, be capable to communicate one’s own ideas and source/native culture to them [4].

As cultural discourse is the major language learning reference source, in the process of studying it becomes a two-way action. If this process is narrowed in scope to the analysis of one target language speaking country life, it would be a step back towards the principle of Anglo-centric cultural approach. The process of an international language studying goes in two directions: (1) the analysis and interpretation of other culture material and (2) reflecting one’s own culture via comparison of similarities and varieties of both phenomena. This two-way action is of a paramount importance, as culture discourse based studies with sustainable approach to cultural diversities are supposed to achieve the following aims:

- Creating an intercultural sphere via relating suggested study material to the source culture;
- Creating the sphere of intercultural pluralism via suggested assumption that even the target language culture is not monolithic as it covers ethnic varieties; and the latter can be more logically generalized by the criteria of age, gender, region, ethnic or social background [4].

So, the intercultural communication competence may be defined as the learner’s ability to perceive various cultures and relate them to the native one. No matter in how much globalised world a modern individual lived, whether distances were measured in kilometres or flight hours, how eagerly one could wish to identify oneself with the cosmopolitan culture, still, nowadays people exhibit firstly their family, region, nation, country, or culture affiliation and information messages. Without sustainable awareness of one’s cultural roots, a person is incapable to understand other national cultures [4].

Communicative language teaching and the development of language skills are realized through learner’s exposure to authentic language material and created virtual language use situations. Intentionally, foreign language teachers either compile textual and situational material themselves or choose ready-made textbooks. An impressive variety of textbooks allow the teacher to select the book that meets the educational requirements and those related to the students’ age, level of mastery, and the ultimate goal of studies best of all. This situation puts forward a question whether the teaching material offered by foreign country publishing houses reflects the demands of the modern approach to language teaching both in the form and content. The practical activities compiled by all the partner countries in the course of *Grundtvig* Learning Partnership project “Visualisation Highlights in Language Teaching” are based on authentic language material and reflect each country’s national identity. Thus, the English language as a tool helps to develop intercultural competence as well as awareness of one’s cultural background.

References

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