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Importance of investigating linguacultural variability in learning foreign languages

Znaczenie badania zmienności językowo- -kulturowej w nauce języków obcych

Abstract

As both language and culture serve communication process, this correlation helps foreign language learners to express syntactic, semantic and pragmatic meanings in order to communicate. Anyone who wants to communicate successfully through language and culture must know the differences between cultures. In this case, a person develops communication skills which include grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic skills. As a rule, this or that concept may be unique to one culture and might not exist in other cultures. That is the main reason of investigating cultural variability surrounding language which is the key to success in learning languages. While boundaries between languages are very clearly traced, cultural boundaries only emerge as a result of speakers' cultural "collision". Observations allow us to conclude that in many other countries, multiculturalism exists as a form of equal coexistence of different cultures within the same country. Since people belong to various cultures, their cultural values are always different. Lots of values exist simply because they differ from each other. If the values of one group of people collide with the values of another group, the value of the group with greater control will begin to dominate.

Keywords: variability, language, culture, cultural values, linguaculture

Streszczenie

Zarówno język, jak i kultura służą procesowi komunikacji, natomiast ich korelacja pomaga osobom uczącym się języków obcych wyrażać znaczenia syntaktyczne, semantyczne i pragmatyczne podczas komunikacji. Każdy, kto chce skutecznie się komunikować, musi znać różnice między kulturami. W tym przypadku osoba rozwija umiejętności komunikacyjne, które obejmują umiejętności gramatyczne, dyskursywne, socjolingwistyczne i strategiczne. Z reguły ta lub inna koncepcja może być charakterystyczna dla jednej kultury i nie istnieć

w innych kulturach. Jest to główny powód badania zmienności kulturowej otaczającej język, będącej kluczem do sukcesu w nauce języków. Chociaż granice między językami są bardzo wyraźnie wytyczone, granice kulturowe wyłaniają się dopiero w wyniku kulturowego „zderzenia" użytkowników. Obserwacje pozwalają stwierdzić, że w wielu innych krajach wielokulturowość istnieje jako forma równego współistnienia różnych kultur w obrębie tego samego kraju. Ponieważ ludzie należą do różnych kultur, ich wartości kulturowe są zawsze różne. Jeśli wartości jednej grupy ludzi zderzą się z wartościami innej grupy, wartość grupy o większej kontroli zacznie dominować.

Słowa kluczowe: zmienność, język, kultura, wartości kulturowe, językoznawstwo

Introduction

Language and culture as two social phenomena are closely related to each other and develop in conditions of mutual influence. This relationship and interaction between language and culture has been investigated by many scientists and philosophers. Over the last century, the relationship between language and culture has been the subject of serious study and theoretical analyses from various perspectives. Interest in this area has not diminished. In general, the question "does language determine culture or culture determine language?" is still a fundamental question of research. These and other similar questions, as well as the forms of interaction of language and culture, have recently become serious in a wider context and have been the subject of discussions and debates.

Culture may be characterized as a "social inheritance" transferred from one generation to another with a conglomeration of individual features differentiating people of one society from another one. Culture is not only a phenomenon, but also a pattern of social behaviour to be followed. It is an exceptional phenomenon of human society with variability and changing diversity. Culture forms beliefs, conveys ideas, and shares knowledge on customs and values. All of these characteristics are communicated through language which is an inseparable part of culture (Sheeraz, Kazemian, 2015).

The essence of culture for human society is possible because of the development and use of a common language among the people. It is the impact of culture on human intelligence that not only effects human personality but also leads one to behave as a part of society. As a result, individuals continue to follow prevailing customs, norms, and values inherited through a social system. Therefore, no human society has ever existed without developing language and culture. Culture as a social process deals with the use of language and communication experienced by people in given circumstances (Sheeraz, Kazemian, 2015). The process of learning a foreign language not only demands an individual to practice linguistic forms but also compels to become familiar with the culture of target language in order to interpret intercultural communication. Therefore, in learning foreign languages it is necessary to provide learners' cultural scope and perception so as to obtain proficiency in intercultural communication of target language.

It is undeniable that both language and culture serve communication. On the one hand, it helps language learners to express syntactic, semantic and pragmatic meanings in order to communicate. Anyone who wants to communicate successfully through language and culture must know existing differences between cultures. In this case, any person can develop communicative abilities – that is, not only to learn grammatical rules, but also to

know where, whom and when to convey these rules in the form of a correct sentence. These skills include grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic skills (Chia-lin, 2008).

As a rule, many problems might arise when transferring information from one language to another. The reason for such a language inconsistency is the lack of an exact equivalent in another language for the expression of a particular concept, or even the absence of the concept itself. Given that concepts or objects expressed by a particular word are unique to one culture and do not exist in other cultures, it is acceptable that there are no appropriate words to express them. Description of the world surrounding the language carriers is not only directly reflected in the language, but also determines the characteristics of the language's reflection in speech. That is the reason why knowing the cultural environment surrounding a language is the key to success in learning a foreign language. While boundaries between languages are very clearly traced, cultural boundaries only emerge as a result of the cultural "collision" of native and non-native speakers. There are two levels of influence on the process of language perception under the influence of culture, the first of which can be attributed to the formal features of language, and the second to the levels of reflection in words and sentences of each national and ethnic groups in the process of reflection (Məmmədov, 2015).

Method

There has been no shortage of methods and approaches for teaching culture. These include the use of various authentic devices, culture clusters and assimilators, incorporation of proverbs, music, songs, celebrations of festivals, and finally, study-abroad programs. Teaching strategies for cultural variability include the comparison method, culture assimilators, drama, newspapers, mass media, observations through movies and other authentic materials, having students visit ethnic restaurants or sections of their hometown, presentations on the customs and traditions of L2 culture, and role-plays in which students demonstrate appropriate cultural behavior in a given situation, opportunities for students to communicate with L2 native speakers and the use of literature (Dema, Moeller, 2012).

Furthermore, a number of traditional methods and approaches to teaching culture, such as movies and video, can be intensified through the combination of digital media. Foreign language instructors are beginning to integrate more movies in the FL classroom as an accessible window'. Media literacy promotes cross-cultural adequacy and conception focused on meanings rather than on forms.

Our approach to this issue is that when talking about the importance of the linguacultural environment, it is necessary to note two main methods. First, at the linguistic level, culture affects semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels of any language. Second, the analysis of language material on cultural basis is liable to change.

Recent research in this field suggests, however, that everyone is supposed to be wary of simply assuming cultural universality without evidence. In experiments, a great amount of systematic differences have been determined between East Asians (EAs) and Westerners (Ws) on a number of basic cognitive processes including memory, attention,

and perception. These groups also differ in the process they take part while describing, predicting and explaining events, in the way they categorize objects and in the way they revise beliefs in the face of new arguments and evidence. This ongoing literature in cultural psychology suggests that culture plays an important and dramatic role in shaping human cognition the world around.

Findings

Here it is possible to mention some of the culture teaching devices since using them teachers can present varieties both on cultural and linguistic levels.

Describing and explaining the culture

One of the mostly-used methods of transferring the cultural information has been by explanation. For this method, teachers could choose to talk about geography, history, literature, art, scientific achievements and other small details of a foreign people. Furthermore, this information could be presented by groups of students or by individual students. While having a higher competence in foreign language, learners can present them in target language, both in and out-of-class activities. These methods can be accompanied by visual illustration in the form of charts, diagrams, maps, and pictures, with films and slides where it is necessary and available (Yi, 2010).

Experiencing culture through language use

While using the above-mentioned method, one may collide such a problem: Do not we waste time in our language class for the teaching culture in this way? There is another approach which doesn't take time from the essential work of language learning. It is fully integrated with the process of assimilation of syntax and vocabulary. Since language is closely connected with every aspect of culture, this approach is useful, when a teacher is fully informed of cultural differences and his students absorb the meaning in many various ways. This awareness should be part of every language teaching classroom where the teacher should orient the thinking of the students so that they will feel curious about such linguacultural varieties and begin applying what they have perceived in their active oral work.

Role playing

Learners of foreign languages may also use the skills in developing their own abilities. While being encouraged to reckon language learning as role playing, learners are inclined to carry this over into classroom acts with gestures, and reaction to simulate a situation in the second culture. Furthermore, students may invent their own situations based on their understanding of the daily life, or the imitation of a foreign movies, etc.

Other popular activities within culture (songs, dances, etc.)

It is always recommended that a sense of reality should be brought into the classroom while students have the opportunity to enjoy these types of activities native speakers of the language enjoy. Some teachers invite celebrities of national sports, dancers, singers, or other native speakers. From time to time, it is advisable to invite native speakers to the language classroom. Learners can ask them questions interesting for them and thus get a clearer understanding of the cultural background. Regular communication may help to improve the mutual understanding and respect of different cultures which is one of the outmost goals of our language teaching and learning.

It goes without saying that foreign language teachers should be foreign culture teachers, having the ability to experience and analyse both the home and target cultures. And teachers of the culture of a linguistic community need informed insight into the culture to be taught and informed insight into the culture of the language learners (Yi, 2010). If possible, teachers should contact with native speakers, discussing all kinds of subjects with them while educating students to cultural interpretation. Finally, teachers of another culture must encourage sensitivity toward the attitudes of the students toward their own and foreign culture, moving delicately toward attitude change. Above all, native teachers and foreign-language teachers should overcome the temptation to demonstrate the superiority of one culture over another.

In our country, the interaction of language and culture, the diversity created by national culture, the factors influencing formation of the cultural environment, and such kind of issues have been the subject of academic research. In his article on the relationship between language and culture, A. Gasimov noted that it is difficult to determine the culture of language or the language of culture. Thus, in addition to the influence of language on the social and technological development of society, the "products" of culture also expand their influence on language (Qasımov, 2011).

According to R. Aslanova, there are areas in the dynamics of culture that undermine previous cultural values and achievements. Attempts to replace the existing culture with a "|new culture" in the ongoing processes can promote tendencies that deny cultural heritage (Aslanova, 2004). N. Valiyeva noted in her book *Some Aspects and Peculiarities of Intercultural Communication in the Process of Globalization* that culture and communication are considered inseparable, because culture, in addition to managing communication, has a direct impact on the decoding of meanings expressed during this process and the submission of the situation that determines the process of communication (Veliyeva, 2013).

In the textbook *Cultural Studies* F. Mammadov first advised to study the national culture of people in order to study their behaviour. By national culture, the author noted that it is determined by ethno-national characteristics (Mamedov/Мамедов, 2015). As can be seen from this approach, the formation of culture makes it necessary to realize it in unity with the language system. It is well known that in many multicultural countries there are different ethnic tribes and peoples who share and accept similar cultural values. At the end of the communication of individuals with these characteristics, difficulties may arise from the psychological aspect of cultural diversity. The deeper the gap created by this cultural

variability between individuals, the more difficult it will be to organize the realization of mutual communication (Bochner, 2003). In the textbook *Culture and communication* the authors (M.Y. Gaziyeva, V.E. Agabeyli, S.M. Mehdiyeva) also touched upon the issue of cultural diversity and explained this process in the following way: "Existence of minorities is inescapable as diversity is a direct way to differ one from many. Diversity includes many aspects – physical characteristics (race, gender, age, physical abilities, etc.), social status (education, income level, etc.), cultural characteristics (beliefs, values, preferences, etc.) and others" (Qaziyeva, Ağabəyli, Mehdiyeva, 2015).

For centuries, many scholars have talked about the interaction of language and culture and have tried to prove that this influence should always be taken into account. Undoubtedly, since language is a social phenomenon, it is supposed to be in direct interaction with its creators and users; at the same time it develops and changes in parallel with the development of society. Language systems that are exposed to different conditions in different contexts differ from each other in their history of development (Abdullayev, 2017).

Everyone knows that culture and communication are inseparable. However, we are confronted with the fact that, like culture, it controls who we talk to and what we talk about, as well as the fact that it regulates the processes of communication. It is under the influence of culture that the process of how people perceive each other's behaviour takes place. In this regard, S.K. Mammadova noted in her textbook *Cultural Studies* that "At different stages of the historical development of culture, as it is adapted to the needs of human thinking and communication, language develops and enriches adequately" (Məmmədova, 2001).

Discussion and results

Our observations allow us to conclude that both immigrants and local ethnic minorities are currently struggling for greater "recognition". In many other countries, multiculturalism exists as a form of equal coexistence of different cultures within the same country and obligation to respect for the existence of each national minority.

Our approach to this issue is that when talking about the relationship between language and culture, the importance of the linguacultural environment, it is necessary to note two main facts. First, at the linguistic level, culture affects the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels of language. Second, the analysis of language material from a cultural aspect or on cultural basis liable to change operatively at all times.

First Vice-President of Azerbaijan, President of Heydar Aliyev Foundation M. Aliyeva noted in this regard: "People who respect their culture, their history, their traditions, their deeds, should respect different cultures and different histories in the same way" (Abdullayev, 2016).

In the end, we come to the conclusion that as people belong to different cultures, their cultural values are always different. But what might happen when people from different cultures meet? If the values of one group of people collide with the values of another group, then misunderstandings can arise. In this case, the value of the group with the largest

management power will begin to dominate. Misunderstandings caused by intercultural differences are more acceptable, although they are more serious than the mistakes made by language in speech.

To raise learners' interests and motivation in culture learning, material development should be estimated. Despite strong resistance from researchers and language educators concerning the dominance of target cultures and stereotypical representation of different cultures used in many ELT contexts, many teachers and learners prefer these sources because there are a variety of communicative activities, interactive orientations, and high quality of images and illustrations. If linguistic and cultural diversity including local culture is actually added to ELT materials, it is obligatory to include reflective elements instead of informative and factual presentation. In this way, learners find it easy to study in lessons of culture relevant to real life communication. This is what is demanded, namely a close connection between culture learning in schools and intercultural communication in real life situations. The efficacy of culture teaching in ELT would be strengthened taking into account native language main features. In other words, what students are taught in L1 in subjects such as history, geography, literature and culture will promote or hinder their culture learning in EFL classes. However, the ELT literature indicates that attention has been paid to the influence of L1 on the acquisition of L2 skills rather than to culture learning. While there is a great number of researches on learners' preservation of their cultural identity during the process of learning a foreign language, little research has been carried on the positive impact of various linguacultural diversities presented within the community where native speakers are living (Nguyen, 2013).

In conclusion, it is suggested that linguacultural variability is created by users and is constantly changing by those very users. Since such cultural systems are not stable, it is obliged to emphasize that each linguacultural environment is formed in response to the existing conditions, and the interaction between different situations in this system is not determinative.

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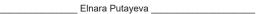
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