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RESEARCH ON DEVELOPING SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN HIGH SCHOOL

Abstract. EFL teaching is focused primarily on developing four basic skills such as reading, speaking, listening and writing that compile speech competence. As a rule, other competencies (language, sociocultural, strategic and discursive) are ignored or accorded very low priority in the EFL classroom. We believe that socio-cultural skills help to sufficiently interact in the world community. In our opinion, the study of cultural diversity *should* be a mandatory part of EFL university courses. During the first year of university study, it is desirable to develop general socio-cultural skills, the next period of study should be focused on developing sociocultural competence in a professional context. The present paper addresses cross-cultural, linguacultural and sociolinguistic aspects of sociocultural competence. The experience in integrating different in-class activities to improve socio-cultural skills was considered. The results of the study revealed that the basic requirement for textbooks and training exercises is authenticity. The language instructors are convinced that cultural context role-plays, games and

project work can enhance the developing sociocultural competence. Few studies deal with acquiring sociocultural skills through technology. The major focus of these research papers is on E-mail, chat, blogs, and video-conferencing as effective tools for sociocultural learning. We, in turn, recommend integrating podcasting technology into the socio-cultural study. Such characteristics of podcasts as authenticity, cultural context materials and the possibility to communicate with native speakers through podcast chats make it an efficient technology to be incorporated into EFL learning and teaching. Further study will consider the issue of developing and improving socio-cultural skills with the help of technology.

Keywords: sociocultural; skills; competence; components; technology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Concerning the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, communicative competence is becoming more and more relevant in the context of EFL teaching and learning. To become a successful user of a foreign language and a competitive specialist in a world labour market it is necessary to consider a very important aspect of foreign language teaching and learning such as sociocultural competence. The experience in EFL teaching in high school makes it possible to confirm that most language instructors focus primarily on developing speech and language competencies, neglecting the importance of other components of communicative competence such as sociocultural, strategic and discursive competencies. It should be noted that culture cannot be perceived as one of the skills – reading, speaking, listening and writing. Culture is a part of all four skills, without which our communication in a target language would be insufficient. [8, p. 26]. Canale states that "the sociolinguistic competence is crucial in interpreting utterances for their social meaning and learners will often fail to achieve their communication ends in the target language, and neither they nor their teachers will understand why [3, p. 8]. According to D. Drlíková for communicating in English as an international language it is crucial to develop at least basic awareness of cultural differences; and because English serves as an international language, the knowledge of the sociocultural of the countries where English is the native language, this is no longer enough. Basic knowledge of other cultures which use English as a primary foreign language is becoming a need. This goal can be achieved via meeting people of various nationalities, lecturing about different communities and their practices, reading, watching films or even playing games [8, p. 27–28].

The issue of developing sociocultural competence was studied by Ukrainian and foreign scientists. American and Canadian linguists N. Chomsky [6], J. Cummins [7], M. Canale [3], and D. Hymes [11] investigated communicative competence and its components to effectively teach English as a second language or foreign language. Ukrainian researchers O. Bihych, G. Boretska, N. Borysko [1], T. Bondar [2], S. Yu. Nikolaieva [13], O. Ohienko [15], M. Duka [9] investigated sociocultural competence in the context of EFL learning. The issues of determining the purpose and content of the formation of foreign-

language sociocultural competence with philological students were investigated by S. Yu. Nikolaieva, I. F. Sobolieva, N. F. Borysko, N. K. Skliarenko and S. V. Smolina [14]. The research on teaching sociocultural competence to the students of technical-economic specialities was carried out by I. V. Hushlevska, A. M. Dakhin, I. H. Yermakov, O. P. Petrashchuk, O. I. Selivanova, Seliverstov, I. P. Yashchuk [10] and Kharkova N. N. [12].

The term "sociocultural competence" was suggested by the Canadian scientist in the field of applied linguistics J. Cummins as one of the components of academic communicative competence [7].

O. Ohienko states that sociocultural competence should be considered as an integrative characteristic of the personality, a set of knowledge, skills that are necessary for intercultural interaction, taking into account cultural and social norms of communicative behaviour; as the willingness to interact with other people according to the norms of society and culture. The need to develop sociocultural competence is explained by socio-economic, cultural and historical changes in society and the labour market. That is why sociocultural competence is a necessary and mandatory component of the professional competence of specialists. The researcher also claims that the theoretical and methodological basis for the formation of sociocultural competence is the sociocultural approach [15, p. 374].

Social competence requires the development of the ability to work in a team to achieve results if it is necessary – to resolve conflicts or prevent them through the search for compromise. The formation of respect for social laws, respect for human rights, and in a multicultural environment – the ability to interact in sociocultural diversity is of particular importance within this competence [2, p. 28].

Thus, sociocultural competence covers the following aspects:

- achieving competence in a foreign culture and at the same time the formation of this competence;
- reflections of own culture and the ability to talk about it in a foreign language;
- achieving intercultural understanding, which leads to respect for others and tolerance [16].

The purpose of sociocultural competence development is to learn the difference between their native culture and other cultures, as well as acquiring the ability to overcome sociocultural differences in everyday, professional and academic communication.

During the EFL course at university, the students are supposed to develop general sociocultural competence and profession-based sociocultural competence as a core component of foreign language communicative competence. Therefore, a language instructor should know the components of sociocultural competence, examine the activities that can help to develop general (as a rule, during the first two semesters of university study) sociocultural competence and profession-based sociocultural competence, convey the experimental studies to prove the efficacy of implemented tools and activities in improving sociocultural competence skills.

2. AIM AND TASKS

In this paper, we have tried to generalize the research findings of the modern scholars in the field of sociocultural competence, determine the components of sociocultural competence and examine the activities suggested by researchers and language instructors to develop general sociocultural competence.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

The EFL curriculum is aimed at developing integrated speech skills based on the already formed foreign-language sociocultural competence and is designed to be as consistent as possible with the goals and content of the specialties of students. Learning macro-skills only makes sense when these skills are considered in a natural professional context. The market demand for such skills is illustrated by the growing trend toward the use of English during the whole period of study in many Ukrainian universities. The content of foreign-language sociocultural competence is determined by its principles:

- is based on international levels of language proficiency (following the European Recommendations) and professional and educational skills;
- meets the national qualification levels of achievement;
- covers professional and academic content (areas of subject knowledge); situational context (context in materials, activities, etc.) is presented; pragmatic content (practical and useful skills are necessary);
- takes into account students' previous experience, their learning needs and final results.

Due to the university syllabus, the students at our university have a twelve-credit mandatory EFL course. The bachelor's students learn EFL during eight semesters at university. Thus, the first two semesters are devoted to revising general topics. This is the time when general sociocultural competence should be emphasized. Sociocultural competence includes the following components (Fig. 1).

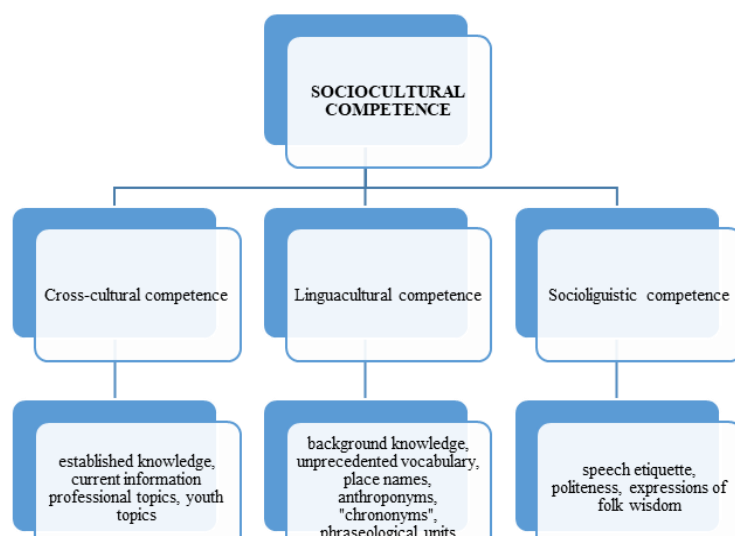


Fig. 1. Components of Sociocultural competence

Sociocultural competence is an integral part of communicative competence. Foreign-language sociocultural competence is the knowledge of the cultural characteristics of native speakers, their habits, traditions, norms of behaviour, etiquette and the ability to understand and adequately use them in intercultural communication. Sociocultural competence determines the success of communication with representatives of foreign-language cultures and allows the participants of conversation to feel confident and comfortable in a foreign-language environment.

Cross-cultural competence is a set of knowledge about the country in which the language is studied, as well as the ability to use the national and cultural components of the language for communication. The difference between cultures among speakers of different languages is mainly determined by the different material and spiritual conditions of the existence of the relevant peoples and countries, the peculiarities of their history, culture, socio-political structure, political system, etc. Thus, it can be concluded that the need to know the specifics of the country whose language is being studied, and thereby the need to master country-specific competence should be one of the main focuses in teaching foreign languages.

Linguacultural studies deal with the methodology of teaching, which explores the issues of familiarizing students with a new culture. Linguacultural studies have their research material. This discipline is inherently linguistic because its subject is the facts of language, which reflect the peculiarities of the national culture studied through language. The formation of linguacultural competence requires no knowledge of country studies as a complex of scientific disciplines, but the so-called background knowledge, that is, knowledge of the country and its culture, is known to all residents of this country.

Possession of FL background knowledge supports a foreigner with a "cultural literacy", and vice versa – the lack of cultural literacy makes him a stranger (outsider), who cannot understand what native speakers only hint at in oral and written communication.

In linguacultural studies, lexical units are understood under unprecedented vocabulary, the plan of expression of which cannot be compared with any foreign-language lexical concepts. Non-equivalent words are intransigent and their meaning is revealed by interpretation.

Toponymic vocabulary reflects the most important stages of the history of the material and spiritual culture of the people and at the same time language patterns appear in it, in connection with which this lexical circle is of interest as historical and geographical material, and as a linguistic source.

In other words, phraseological units:

- 1) are not used every time, but are reproduced as ready-made units with a certain meaning in the language;
- 2) are marked by the stability of the composition and constancy of the structure;
- 3) often denote one concept and enter into synonymous relationships with words.

Sociolinguistic competence is the ability to use the rules of delicate and conversational speech in communication. In EFL teaching it is necessary to pay more attention to sociolinguistic competence, that is, to develop the abilities of students to use and transform language forms following the situation of communication, and to have situational options for language proficiency. Sociolinguistic competence correlates with the

language picture of the world, it should be defined as mastery of a set of linguistic means and the ability to make their choice depending on the socio-cultural and situational aspects of the context. This, in turn, involves mastering vocabulary with a national and cultural component; phraseological units with national and cultural semantics; formulas of language communication; proverbs, sayings, and catchphrases.

The formation of sociolinguistic competence involves the creation of skills to use and observe:

- markers of social relations, for example, student or so-called youth slang;
- rules of courtesy and politeness;
- registers of communication: neutral, colloquial.

Such aspects of sociolinguistic competence as politeness should be paid peculiar attention. D. Drlíková describes the aspects of politeness that can be problematic to Czech speakers. And they are: addressing unknown people, people at school, at the workplace, compliments, degree of directness. Besides, intercultural interaction includes non-verbal communication. The following types of non-verbal communication such as kinesics (body, gesture, face and eye communication), artefacts (personal items), proxemics (space and territory), vocalics or paralanguage (tone of voice, pitch, etc.), haptics (touch), olfactics (smell), taste, and chronemics (time) are determined.

“Linguistic politeness is a partly routinized and partly creative language manifestation of social values, finding its way of reflection at various levels of language representation (phonic, grammatical, lexical, textual, etc.) and reflecting interactional strategies by which interactants signal their interpersonal supportiveness, i. e. their intention to consider each other and satisfy shared expectations about cultural and situational assumptions to avoid or at least soften face-threatening acts, to create happy conditions for interaction and to avoid losing one’s face” [Válková, 2004, p. 38].

According to S. Thorn such Internet communication tools as e-mail, chat, blogs, and videoconferencing can link linguistically and culturally disparate groups of language learners and teachers in institutionalised settings for (bilingual) social interaction and project-based intercultural collaboration [17].

To develop socio-cultural skills language instructors use various textbooks such as – General English (New Headway) and General English with Business English orientation (International Express). International Express, except for Elementary, contains numerous exercises to develop sociocultural competence and raise intercultural awareness [8, p. 50]. New Headway does include some exercises to develop sociocultural competence in ELF, such as the reading and code, eating habits and business etiquette in various countries, etc. [8, p. 59]. The author also suggests using role games on contrasting a cultural context, cultural awareness-raising games such as "Two societies", "fairy tale", "What would you think/do if...", card games that aim at adapting to new rules and the environment the target society, making a story of an intercultural encounter in form of a cartoon, short film, or a sequence of photographs.

In our teaching practise, we often use podcasts to improve different foreign language skills. The topics from the British Council, for example, are very interesting: "Whose game is

it?" (the podcast describes the changes that took place in a football game), "New Year's revolution" (the listener will know about the traditions of celebrating New Year in Scotland), the podcast "The Iron Lady" is devoted to Margaret Thatcher and tells the story how she became an "Iron Lady", in the episode "Backseat drivers" the students will hear about the British love of driving from classic to Formula 1 racing, about great British cheeses, about British love of books. The students will be able to find out how tea is making a comeback in the UK, and how the biggest names in British music were created [4, p. 143]. The author claims that "podcasts help to develop not only listening and speaking skills to learn new vocabulary, but also learn basic characteristics of other cultures. It will help to avoid misunderstanding in future and communicate effectively" [4, p. 143]. One of the benefits of podcasts is their authenticity. This is an opportunity to explore how English is used by native speakers. Language instructors recommend having to use authentic texts in ESL lessons to give the students more of a sense of how English is used. Furthermore, the subscription to podcasts series allows the students to comment on the topics and communicate with subscribers all over the world. The researchers also explored the designing of self-made podcasts to extend cultural knowledge [5].

5. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The result of the present research showed sociocultural competence is a component of foreign language communicative competence is interpreted as a set of knowledge, skills that are necessary for intercultural interaction. The sociocultural skill set is determined by its structure: cross-cultural, linguacultural and sociolinguistic knowledge. The basics of sociocultural study are taught in school. EFL course at university is aimed at extending general and profession-based sociocultural skills. During the first year of university study, it is advisable to develop general sociocultural skills. The analysis of EFL teaching experience revealed that to develop sociocultural skills authentic textbooks should be examined on the presence of cultural and regional geographic material and activities to improve sociocultural skills. Language instructors also suggest using different kinds of role games, and card games to make a sociocultural study effective and motivated. Only a few research consider the implementation of technology in sociocultural learning. E-mail, chat, blogs, videoconferencing and podcasts can serve as digital tools that can enhance sociocultural study. Further research will deal with developing profession-based sociocultural skills with a strong focus on technology.

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СОЦІОКУЛЬТУРНА КОМПЕТЕНТНІСТЬ ЗДОБУВАЧІВ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ: ХАРАКТЕРСТИКА ТА НАПРЯМИ РОЗВИТКУ

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Анотація. Навчання іноземної мови у закладах вищої освіти зосереджено, здебільшого, на розвитку чотирьох основних навичок, таких як читання, говоріння, аудіювання та письмо, які формують мовну компетентність. Як правило, іншим навичкам і вмінням (мовленнєвим, соціокультурним, стратегічним і дискурсивним) не приділяється належної уваги. Ми переконані, що соціокультурні навички допомагають повноцінно взаємодіяти у світовому співтоваристві. На нашу думку, вивчення культурного різноманіття має бути

обов'язковою частиною університетського курсу з іноземної мови. Протягом першого року навчання в університеті бажано розвивати загальні соціокультурні навички, наступний період навчання повинен бути зосереджений на розвитку соціокультурної компетентності в професійному контексті. У цій роботі розглядаються міжкультурні, мовні та соціолінгвістичні аспекти соціокультурної компетентності. Розглянуто досвід інтеграції різних підручників, тренувальних вправ та інших видів роботи для вдосконалення соціокультурних навичок. Результати дослідження показали, що основною вимогою до підручників і навчальних вправ є автентичність. Викладачі мови переконані, що рольові ігри культурного контексту та проектна робота можуть підвищити розвиток соціокультурної компетентності. Мало досліджень зосереджено на оволодінні соціокультурними навичками за допомогою технологій. Основну увагу в цих наукових роботах приділено використанню електронної пошти, чатів, блогів, відеоконференцій як ефективних інструментів для вдосконалення соціокультурних навичок. Ми, в свою чергу, рекомендуємо інтегрувати технологію подкастингу в соціокультурне дослідження. Такі характеристики подкастів, як автентичність, культурний контекст та можливість спілкуватися з носіями мови через подкаст-чати, роблять його ефективною технологією, яка може бути задіяною у навчання та викладання іноземної мови. У подальшому дослідженні буде розглянуто питання розвитку і вдосконалення соціокультурних навичок професійного спрямування за допомогою технологій.

Ключові слова: соціокультурний; навички; компетентність; компоненти; технології

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