The importance of Teaching Culture as a part of learning Foreign Languages

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ABSTRACT

In modern socio-economic situation, culture is an important part of content of teaching English. The article deals with the subject of culture as the contents and the context of teaching English, the object of testing and the characteristics of the teaching process. The article is based upon theoretical research, empirical analysis and classroom observations.

Key words: culture, elements of culture, the content of culture, different culture, English language, testing, language teaching, characteristics of the educational process.

Introduction

Definition of culture. Culture is as a part of learning foreign languages, it is knowledge, norms and attitudes stored in a large or small social group. Knowledge, norms and attitudes exist traditionally in the community of people and are transmitted from generation to generation, uniting its members with collectively shared values, allowing you to distinguish “our” from “someone else” and conditioning resistance to the influence of others cultures. Culture is a sustainable form collective being (behavior).

Culture is understood as an idealized and desired level of achievement of individual and social activity, living conditions, science, arts, as well as criteria allowing to distinguish “culture” from “lack of culture”.

The difference between “authentic” and “artificial” culture. If the authentic culture really characterizes the real way of thinking, soul and behavior of the people, artificial culture paints its “sold image” in the form of souvenirs, stylized outfits, ritual masks, stage performances and attractive stereotypes to tourists[1,179].

Culture in the modern world. The feature of the culture associated with teaching English in the modern world with its multicultural character. In the past, when the culture taught to students along with the English language was limited to the traditions of life on the British Isles. Cultural diversity has become a learning content due to the interest in American version of the English language and the diversification of American society. In the era of global English language learning, culture requires the appeal to the plurality of cultural expressions of large and small English-speaking peoples and a tolerant attitude towards differences. There is a global human a culture that contains common features characteristic of any person on the planet. The culture of the nation stands out with its typical ethnographic, psychological and social characteristics (megaculture). The culture is functioning regional, age, gender, professional and political unity (macro culture). The culture of collectives and groups (microculture) is manifested [2,14], as well as individuals. All kinds of culture represent interest for study and learning.

Foreign language and culture. Cultural education in the context of teaching foreign languages includes, firstly, informing students about their and other culture as examples of diversity forms of collective being. Another component of the content of teaching culture is information for students about outstanding examples of material and spiritual activities of their representatives and other cultures as a fund of world cultural heritage. The evaluation component of the concept “Culture” is also implemented in educational process in the form of fostering a sense of pride in their culture, interest and respect for other cultural traditions, as well as a tolerant attitude towards cultural diversification (diversity) in the world. Training evaluative component of the culture of other peoples and countries allows you to better understand representatives of other cultures, to prevent and overcome the state of “cultural shock”, it is better to
organize an intercultural dialogue in the spirit of mutual tolerance. Through cultural studies, students conclude that the American smile is not an indicator of optimism, but a sign of politeness. For some students may be the discovery that the abundance of food on Russian table can be perceived foreign guests not as a sign of hospitality, but as a “cholesterol threat”. Teaching one’s own and other cultures is often limited to familiarization of students with some national traditions, individual works of art, outstanding scientists, tourist attractions, examples of folklore creativity. At the same time, other components remain undisclosed and undigested, necessary for a more complete orientation in a non-native cultural context, more adequate communication of their cultural characteristics, as well as for the implementation of mediator (intermediary) functions in intercultural communication.

**The content of culture learning.** The content of culture learning can be divided into the following components:
- elements of culture (artifacts, monuments, ethnography);
- manifestations of culture (episodes, cases, events);
- indicators of culture (habits, tastes, preferences);
- facts of culture (values, norms, stereotypes);
- measurement of culture (collectivism-individualism, spontaneity - punctuality, femininity - masculinity).

*The elements of culture* are what students can form a holistic view of the external attributes the life of other cultural society. It is the most traditional component in the content of teaching the culture of another people.

The elements of culture, for example, include in authentic folk costumes or products, creativities, household items, pottery and culinary products, national dishes, popular holidays, etc. For example, traditional English pudding is a famous element of British culture.

*The cultural expressions* are especially important for intercultural knowledge, because the content of training is dominated by “noticeable cultural features” in Humanitarian sciences - pedagogy and psychology. The students’ conclusions can be both objective and subjective, but in all cases they are the result of mastering strategies, visual cognition of another culture, which is the most important for teaching a different culture in an English language curriculum. Perhaps the main task in visually acquainting students with the manifestations of culture is to teach them to confirm or refute the stereotypes they know. The questions of interest to students may include the following: “Do all Englishmen really eat oatmeal in the morning?”, “Are the British a prim nation?”, “Do the British really drink tea at five evenings?”, “Do all the people of the United Kingdom really serve roasted turkey for Christmas?” and others. Observation of cultural manifestations can cause “culture shock” among students, positively as well as negatively.

*Culture indicators act* as implicit signals meaning that it can met with representatives of another culture. Cultural indicators are often reflected in the way of people’s life and their representatives. Knowledge of culture indicators is essential in order to distinguish between “ours” and “others”, recognize the peculiarities of unusual behavior and adapt in a new cultural environment. For example, an indicator of British culture avoid talking to certain topics including family income, religious belonging, existing diseases, details of personal life, etc. Also, an indicator of British culture can be considered a visit by men to pubs in the evening time and especially on Friday night. A vanishing indicator of British culture can be considered by a traditional visit British or other Protestant churches on Sundays. The indicator of Western culture is as a whole that the desire of children, when they are already in older adolescence to live separately from their parents, although today, this side of the life way is undergoing.

*Cultural facts* are even less explicit content teaching the culture of other peoples, because facts are not always outwardly noticeable, but stubbornly repetitive stubbornly and present necessarily in the collective mentality cultural characteristics. The facts of culture include religion and beliefs, common superstitions and revered traditions, collective beliefs about the benefits or harms of one or another food, shared views on how to stay healthy. Culture carriers usually do not demonstrate the facts of their cultural way of life to representatives of other communities, although they do not hide them.
The dimensions of culture represent the deepest component, characterize the most common cultural characteristics that are manifested in the life of the people for all possible exceptions. For example, Russian culture is usually characterized by its “Feminine” dimension, with a typical its poetry, dreaminess and striving for the future, songwriting, openness, sincerity and imagery. Western culture is endowed with masculine, a dimension is characterized by determination, activity, offensiveness, use of force, will and pragmatism. Feminine mentality is the typical for a collective culture, while many Western countries refer to individual cultures, which emphasize the independence of a person from society with the right to inviolability of his personal life (privacy). In various components of cultural knowledge, people differ from each other in their depth and evidence for direct observation, study and description. This difference can be demonstrated in fig. 1.

![Figure: 1. The structure of knowledge about culture](image)

The elements of culture
Cultural manifestation
Cultural indicators
Cultural facts
Measuring culture

Testing cultural knowledge. Cultural education involves monitoring the results of educational work. For this appropriate test materials are required, suitable for evaluations of all components of declarative and students' behavioral knowledge of other people’s culture. The structure of cultural knowledge in the test architecture includes knowledge about the norms of collective behavior and the rules of individual behavior in a team, about the cultural heritage of one's own and other peoples and relations of peoples belonging to different cultures. The components of the tested cultural knowledge is information about “native” and “target” cultures. In addition to information, knowledge components include cultural competencies, it means learning behavioral strategies in native and other culture. The components of the testing knowledge include students’ judgments about their native and other cultures, as well as about the relationship between different cultures. Test construct (main objects of testing) contains cultural knowledge of students, the behavior of students at home and in different environment, attitude towards “ours” and “strangers” culture. The format of testing students' cultural knowledge is presented in the form of a choice, building and constructing a response [4].

To test student relationships to native and other culture, as well as to intercultural relations, you can use a written statement with elements that reasoning based on the original thesis or situations with a well-founded inference. The following topics are possible to write statements: “In Rome do as Romans do”, “Can the leopard change his spots?”, “It’s not nice clothes that make a gentleman”. The subject of the written statement can be set by the situation: “You are coming to stay with the host family in the USA. Upon arrival you are told that you will share a room with the host's adopted son who is black, a refugee from an African
country, with a very poor command of English yet. What are you going to do in this situation?”. Written statements are as a format tests, assess the attitude of students to representatives of other cultures, perception of native culture, as well as readiness for intercultural dialogue. For the assessment of written statements are used pre-developed criteria.

In modern socio-economic the situation, culture is an important part of content of teaching English language. This makes it necessary to develop not only teaching methods, but also testing the components of students’ cultural knowledge. Moreover, the culturological approach to teaching foreign languages highlights naturally the problem of studying the methodological culture of pedagogical activity. All this is natural, since the language always develops functions in the context of culture, both natural and educational. Today the connection between content learning and application of knowledge by on the one hand and cultural context of learning and life by on the other hand, it is recognized by everyone.

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