



Original Contribution

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE: DESPITE THE DIFFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

The following article will present a view on the importance of intercultural dialogue. It looks at the language as a mirror of culture which reflects not only the reality, the actual conditions of life, but also the social consciousness of the people, their mentality, their national character, their traditions, customs, value system and perception. Language creates its own, specific picture of the world. It carries the national culture from one generation to another. It keeps the cultural values in the vocabulary, in the grammar, in the folklore, in the proverbs and sayings, in its oral and written form. Intercultural communication cannot be achieved only with mastering foreign languages. It needs overcoming of the cultural barrier, too. This barrier is “invisible” and is only felt when there is a clash of two or more cultures. The cultural misunderstanding can cause great conflicts, even wars.

Key Words: foreign language, communication, national character, values, linguistic characteristics

INTRODUCTION

How can intercultural dialogue be realized, in spite of the differences? That is, how can we reach mutual understanding between two or more participants in the communication act, when they belong to different cultures and speak different languages? Language is a mirror of cultures. It reflects not only the reality, the actual conditions of life, but also the social consciousness of the people, their mentality, their national character, their traditions, customs, value system and perception. Language creates its own, specific picture of the world. It carries the national culture from one generation to another. It keeps the cultural values – in the vocabulary, in the grammar, in the folklore, in the proverbs and sayings, in its oral and written form. Intercultural communication cannot be achieved only with mastering foreign languages. It needs overcoming of the cultural barrier, too. This barrier is “invisible” and is only felt when there is a clash of two or more cultures. The cultural misunderstanding can cause great conflicts, even wars. In such conflicts people start to understand better their

national culture, their vision of life, their boundaries, so that they can accept the “otherness”. This is why the modern global world puts the specialists before the following complex tasks:

To study the roots, the forms and the development of culture in the different nations and their contacts.

To teach tolerance, respect and understanding of the other cultures in the process of learning a foreign language.

METHOD

Intercultural communication is a crossing point of cultures, which, on the other hand, presupposes a culture of crossing lines. The Russian proverb “В чужой монастыр со своим уставом не ходят” is still valid. Its analogue in English expresses the same thought in other words: “When in Rome, do as Romans do”. In both languages the wisdom of the people tries to avoid cultural clash. The opposition “me – the others”, “me – not me” contains conflict between cultures. Each nation perceives the world through its own coordination system and has its own material characteristics, which make its life unique. As they reflect the national culture, these characteristics are not accessible to representatives of another language and culture. Each language has its own way of

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reflecting the world, creating a “language picture”.

RESULTS

This picture is specific for every nation but it also reflects common human features, as the objective world is one for all people, no matter what language they speak. There are universal values and notions – such as life, bread, home, family. They have practical meaning of mutual understanding at intercultural communication.

In the new, globalizing world the study of foreign languages means a deeper study of the world, of the culture of the people whose language is being studied, of their way of life, national character and mentality. The knowing of the meaning of the words, of the grammar world and the phonetic characteristics is not enough for the use of language as a means of communication. To form intercultural competence means not only to form linguistic, communicative, strategic and discursive competences. Intercultural competence also includes the following aspects of socio-cultural competence:

when, how, whom and whereto say or write the thing

How a given notion “lives” in the reality of the foreign language.

Language phenomena reflect the facts of the social life, life of a nation. When teaching a foreign language, it is necessary to teach the social and cultural life of the people who speak this language.

Information and communication technologies in the contemporary setting offer a great deal of opportunities for participation in intercultural dialogue in interactive forms. Vast horizons of opportunity lie in the Internet for different types of “simulations”. It offers opportunity for modelling interaction between the real worlds of languages and cultures in virtual reality for example: European –Asian, Bulgarian- Belgium; Russian-American and others. They all have their personal mission and comprehend “the other” through the prisms of their own national-cultural stereotypes. The simulation aims to create an idea about the nationality and culture of others. There are different stages of simulation games which could be outlined:

Setting of the social group, which will participate (students, administrative staff, businessmen)

Introduction of the mediator/facilitator which will be the leading figure in the activities

The participants write down different

stereotypes, characteristics of personalities, outer appearance, significances, popular persons as they try to create a cumulative profile of the nation and culture they will attempt a dialogue. Example: Belgians will write down their ideas about Bulgarians.

Similarly, Bulgarian participants do the same for the Belgium side

The two sides share their notes via a video-conference in real time and with the assistance of the mediator. There is no doubt that some cultural conflicts will appear.

The conflict becomes a focal point in the creation of personal mission in the world of the other culture to check through trials in a setting with unknown settings of communication.

Participants “live” in different than their own national-cultural parameters- speak a language which is the intermediate between the two groups. They participate in traditional customs, holidays of the other nation. They search for what the natives of the language speak and how they react and communicate. In this process the participants manage their skills to overcome the “cultural shock” and to accept the differences of the world; they are introduced to the cultural identity of the other side. This leads to a solution of conflict in the field of cultural integration where “I “and “you” together solve the conflicts and overcome different cultural stereotypes.

This type of strategy for intercultural communication offers an opportunity to see you through the eyes of the others. This will allow your identity to accept part of others’ culture and mentality which makes us richer.

CONCLUSION

The cultural differences can easily be seen when comparing linguistic characteristics. The Russian word “дом” can easily be translated into all languages – in English, for example, it means “house”. The Russian word, however, has a wider meaning – in its semantics, it contains each building, where people live and work. While in the English context “house” is where you live, not where you work; what you work in is “building” and the multi-floor house is a “block of flats”. The Russian word “дом” has the meaning of “a home fireplace”, to which the English correspondence is “house”. The Russian word “дом” has other meanings, too, which are translated in English in different ways – “детский дом”, for example, is “children’s home”, „торговой дом” – “a commercial firm. On the other hand, the English word “house” has some meanings which are not

there in the word “дом”- “house of commons”, “opera house”, “the first house starts at five”. “Дом” and “house” also have different uses. In Russian – the word “дом” is present in each address, while in English this is out of the context – they simply write the number of the house before the name of the street – 10 Downing Street.

The wider use of the Russian word “дом” explains the differences in the semantic field and the ways it can be combined. This presents a considerable difficulty in the learning of the foreign language. In this case, it is important to mark the cultural differences

at the level of notions and ideas.

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