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Developing sociocultural competence in the Korean Language Classroom

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Abstract

The article highlights problems of developing sociocultural competence as one of the main components of communicative competence, its constituents and ways of teaching at Korean lessons.

Key words

sociocultural competence, cross-cultural competence, concentric approach, context-dominated cultures.

At present the Russian educational system is developing along with the European system. The Russian Government does the best for university graduates level to meet the modern international standard and specialists from the Russian Federation to be in great demand in a highly competitive market. In this connection the Russian Government introduced a whole number major reforms which change the education system at large. The universities have gone from 5-year education to the Bologna educational system of a two-cycle system of study, Bachelor and Master Studies. In addition, in 5-year education curricular and systems of goals have been reformed.

The goals of the Soviet education were to provide students with universal knowledge, skills and abilities. The modern Russian education is aimed at personality development, cognition and creation in university students. In other words, there was a conversion from the subject-knowledge model to the practically-oriented and efficient model. In this connection, the difference between "competence" and "awareness" has become very popular recently among Russian educators. The term "competence" means a range of points in which the person is well informed, whereas "awareness" presupposes possession of knowledge and competence which let him or her evaluate something [5].

The ongoing development has touched on all the levels of education, specialities and different degrees. This trend can be very well displayed in teaching foreign languages which methods and approaches have undergone tremendous changes among the humanities during the last 20 years. In the past, a foreign language was not considered to be a major and it received the least attention. However it seems that nowadays this subject is treated as a highly-significant and a popular one. As a result, the educational goals and objects have dramatically changed along with the increasing of the credit hours.

The curricular in modern teaching foreign languages are aimed at developing the following key communicative competencies: speech, language, sociocultural, compensatory, educational-cognitive.

The speech competence means developing of communicative skills in the four main types of speech production (speaking, listening, reading, writing).

The language competence deals with learning new language means (phonology, spelling, lexis, grammar), linguistic phenomena of the language under study, various forms of expression ideas in L1 and L2.

The sociocultural competence imparts cultural knowledge of the L2 country to students. It also develops skills to represent their country, its culture in a foreign-language environment.

The compensatory competence is aimed at developing skills of communicating under the lack of means and knowledge.

The educational-cognitive competence focuses on further development of general and special learning techniques, ways of self-study languages and cultures, including new information and computer technology.

In addition to the competences mentioned above, there is one more important point - developing cross-cultural competence. It's a complex of knowledge, skills and abilities which can help a person interact with representatives of other cultures within the scope of any register. Cross-cultural competence is closely connected with the concept "cross-cultural communication" which in a speech act means adequate mutual understanding of two participants belonging to different cultures [9].

The sociocultural competence is precisely the point which underlies cross-cultural competence and it is supposed to be an important constituent of cross-cultural communication. The Russian educators include in the sociocultural competence the following components: linguistic-cultural, sociolinguistic and culturological competencies [4]. On the list there can be social-psychological competence [1].

Linguistic-cultural competence is knowledge of national customs, traditions and realia of the L2 country. It can help elicit information analogous to a native speaker's and communicate successfully. Its basic components are background knowledge and ability to use them in achieving an understanding, realia lexis and ability to use it in cross-cultural communication.

The sociocultural competence is a combination of knowledge, skills and abilities which help provide cross-cultural communication. It takes into account conventional rules of language use appropriate for this

social sector, communicative purpose and intention, social status of interlocutors. The main components of this competence type are knowledge of social linguistic markers, accepted rules of politeness, the collective wisdom, communication registers and the ability to single out the sociolinguistic component in language units.

Culturological competency is a comprehensive system of conceptions of national customs, traditions, realia which can help elicit information analogous to a native speaker's and communicate successfully. Its basic components are knowledge of L2 speakers and sources of the ethnic and national-cultural information.

The social-psychological competence is knowledge of stereotypes of verbal and non-verbal behavior of L2 speakers, the ability to effectively interact and to use appropriate strategies in accordance with the knowledge. The principal parts are the ability to orient in social contexts, to adequately assess the partner's emotional state, his or her personality characteristics, to choose behavior patterns suitable for a situational context.

Developing skills, knowledge and abilities underlie the competences mentioned above. The sociocultural competence requires background knowledge, L2 country cultural knowledge and also to apply them in cross-cultural communication. It contributes much to the formation of the second-order socialization, conceptions of the new system, regulations and values, new world vision, acknowledgement of the unique nature of their own culture. Moreover, it helps them broaden the scope of knowledge and understanding the surroundings, to move to a new level of understanding and awareness of the real world.

The formation of the sociocultural competence is based on the sociocultural approach which is the key criteria in selection linguistic units. The implementation of this approach is possible only with a glance of the different teaching principles such as the principle of the didactic culture-conformity, the principle of domination of the problematic culturological knowledge, the principle of cultures dialogue and the principle of the cultural reflection.

The principle of the didactic culture-conformity is considered to teach L2 culture and is used during the selection of the cultural information for learning purposes.

The principle of domination of the problematic culturological knowledge is aimed at impartial perception of the multi-cultural world, analysis techniques, classification, division of cultural data, skills of L1 culture description [6, 282].

The principle of cultures dialogue is aimed at studying and comparison of cultures. As a result, students will be able to identify not only differences between the cultures, but also outline similarities as the standard of friendly and mutual coexistence in a multicultural society, develop an active position against cultural inequality and discrimination [7,107].

The principle of the cultural reflection proposes cultural self-determination by means of a foreign language. It is necessary to create didactic-methodological conditions under which students could reflect on

their own culture and themselves [7, 103].

The goal of the sociocultural approach is knowledge with L2 culture by the use of comparative analysis with L1 culture, the ability to discriminate the L2 culture elements, to accept and to understand perception and understanding the real world by L2 speakers. The main teacher's aim is developing students' ability of adequate communication.

In spite of increasing interest in learning oriental languages (which can be compared with that in European languages) in modern Russian teaching methodology, there are relatively few studies of developing sociocultural competence.

At present the Korean language is studied at lots of Russian universities as either a major and a minor "Linguist. Interpreter of two foreign languages (Korean and English)", "Orientalist speaking Korean". Human resource development means learning Korean from basic to advanced level. As teaching Korean started not so long ago there is still no generally accepted teaching methods and educational material. Each university develops own teaching system depending on a curriculum. However the unifier for them is learning the language through culture, Korean customs, traditions and lifestyle. But the complexity is that Korean culture is completely different from western culture familiar to students since school. That is why educators can encounter a number of difficulties - not only to teach conception of L2 frequent cultural elements, but also to develop skills to understand and accept L2 culture through reflection on their own culture and themselves.

The points mentioned above require definite types of tasks which can be divided in 5 groups [8].

The first type - understanding oneself in a part of multicultural subjects in a native environment. Students should compare Korean and Russian society to single out groups of different criteria (gender, job, social status); to carry out search and analysis, to present culturological resources (texts, poems, films). The typical tasks are searching for information in Korean and Russian about representatives of different nationalities and cultures. For the preliminary stage a teacher can use such texts as "국제 하숙집" or "기숙사 생활" in which lifestyle of foreign students studying abroad is described. These texts can help students work out a conception of their group membership; group belonging; group affiliation and talk about cultural peculiarities of each country, to determine similarities and differences between Russian and Korean cultures.

The second type - awareness of the fact that group belonging changes depending on situational context and interaction. Students should represent their own group belonging with hierarchy of cultural groups; analyze, compare and discuss possible changes of the group belonging hierarchy depending on the situational context; talk about possible factors affecting the group hierarchy and its formation. The most appropriate tasks are the ones which let students imagine themselves as a representative of a hierarchical group, e.g. "전통 문화", "면접", "병원". For example, in a topic "면접" students can act either as an employee or an employer.

The third type is elicitation of cultural similarities between L1 and L2 representatives of various cultural

groups and countries for broadening their own group belonging. These tasks are focused on searching and classification of culturological material about Korean and Russian societies; talking about similarities between representatives of Russian and Korean cultures, searching and interpretation of information supporting this similarity. It can be done in topics “여유 시간”, “취미”, “운동”, “교육”. Talking about such topics can help students create viewpoints about free time, hobby, sport and education.

The forth task type - determination of their position, role and relevance, responsibility in global universal development. These tasks are oriented towards students' search and identification of current global processes, search for information about people strongly influencing problems and their solutions, the role of students in global problems, students' detailed statements defining their roles in the problems. The most appropriate topic can be the topic “환경” discussing which students are supposed to realize themselves as a part of the planet, dependence of future on them.

The fifth variety of tasks is participation in actions against cultural aggression and discrimination. Students analyze and compare cultural groups for purpose of identification cultural inequality, talk about and prepare reports on issues of cultural inequality, discuss and express opinions on dealing with this issue. The most appropriate topic can be the topic “문화간의 소통”. While talking about it students learn how to solve problems connected with lack of knowledge of cultural traditions.

For accomplishment of these tasks students must speak Korean at an advanced level. Retzker suggests applying the concentric approach which allows to study phenomena several times but each time at a deeper level [3]. In this case the tasks mentioned above can be used at all stages of learning a language. The first three groups of tasks will conform to the elementary and intermediate levels as there is no need for search and interpretation a considerable amount of information. Lessons can be conducted in forms of question - answer tests, quizzes and modeling which are subtypes of a roleplay.

In teaching it is important to take into account the striking difference between Korean and Russian in Lexis, Grammar and Language system. Korean is a context-dominated language in which a greater amount of information is communicated via relevant contextual features (social status hierarchy among participants in the course of the interaction) [2]. Moreover, it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that Korean is of a masculine type [11], i.e. politeness is expressed by means of lexical and grammar structures whereas in an Indo-European family of languages it is a pragmatic category.

It is the difference between the cultures is a source of the difficulties in understanding especially at an elementary level. Some grammatical features can be discussed along with helpful comments on Korean culture. For example, beginner students think that the politeness suffix 씨 is used only when addressing a person forgetting about its necessity in constructing a sentence.

Let us consider some examples.

(1)

- 투이씨, 어디에 가요? - Tu-i, where are you going?

- 시장에 가요. 치엔 씨는 어디에 가요? - I'm going to the market. Where is Chi-yen going?

- 저는 공원에 가요 - I'm going to the park. [12, 50].

In the mini-dialogue (1) there are two variants of using the suffix 씨. In the first sentence it does not correlate with the other cases, in the second sentence it is the subject of the sentence and is used with the marker 는. 투이씨 and 치엔 씨는 can be translated as address words. But is the second variant 씨는 also possible? Why not use only the variant 씨 which is more characteristic for European languages. At this stage in addition to the grammatical analysis it is necessary to draw students' attention to Korean-based cultural practices - it is more common to address a person by his name or his or her position than to use pronouns which is more conventional in European languages. Going through this stage students study fundamentals of sociocultural competence and ideo-ethnic features which enable them to successfully communicate.

The following examples are also illustrations of cultural components in learning process.

(2)

모 (rice seedling) - 벼 (rice growing in rice paddies) - 쌀 (rice grain) - 밥 (boiled rice) - 진지 (boiled rice - honorific form) [13, 42].

In (2) there are words denoting rice in Korean. Such a number of signifiers for one meaning points to its relevance for this ethnic group. A teacher should emphasize the importance of cultural difficulties encountered.

3.1. 일주일 만에 만나니 그녀는 살이 찌서 동글동글해 보였다.

I met her in a week's time and saw that she had put on excess weight.

3.2. 조그마한 손으로 동글동글하게 만두를 빚었다.

He made big dumplings by his little hands [13, 52].

In (3) the words 동글동글 (very round) / 둥글둥글 (round) are the representative language samples of Korean culture. In Russian onomatopoeic and descriptive words are represented only in onomatopoeic lexis and are not used in adult speech. In Korean this area of lexis also includes image-imitating words frequently used in speech. Besides such words have strong (큰 말) and weak (작은 말) forms. Input, classifications and

usage demand for great attention and thorough preparations on the teacher's part.

(4)

4.1. 평안 감사도 제가 싫으면 그만이다. To force oneself [14, 54].

4.2. 앞친 데 닳친 격이다. Misfortune never comes singly [14, 33].

Proverbs and sayings reflect national character to the fullest. That is why comparative analysis of Russian and Korean phraseological units can contribute not only to increasing vocabulary but also to developing background knowledge necessary for adequate communication. In addition in courseworks students analyze and classify phraseological units in accordance with criteria. E.g., in Russian a person who is thirsty drinks like a horse but in Korean he is compared with a whale.

Developing sociocultural competence is carried out not only by way of specially designed tasks and exercises but also grammatical and lexical analysis, translation of linguistic-cultural texts, comparative analysis of linguistic units.

In conclusion it should be noted that sociocultural competence is one of the relevant components in education which must be developed from beginner levels. During the learning process students understand L2 culture, its traditions and customs. Being able to identify similarities and differences between Korean and Russian cultures, they develop skills to represent their own country and culture in cross-cultural interaction. It teaches them either to respect national traditions and to be tolerant towards customs of other countries. Besides it broadens background knowledge and help them understand the world around them through L2.

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