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Second language acquisition: competency model with using Interactive technology in the EL classroom

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Abstract

Cross-cultural communication in the context of competence and educational system is the major focus in this project. The paper concerns the issue of cross-cultural communication in the sphere of university education in the EL classroom. Special attention is given to the problems of innovation potential of different methods and models for the formation of cross-cultural competency. The article concentrates on developing cross-cultural awareness that students of non-linguistic higher schools should have knowledge in order to effectively communicate with other people. This awareness can be developed by means of particular didactic organization of a foreign language teaching process. Some methods and models aimed at students' adopting peculiarities of foreign non-linguistic reality are considered here. Moreover, the author argues that there is a necessity to pay extra attention to the parameters of shaping cross-cultural competence. It is claimed that intercultural sensitizer (culture assimilator) is one of the most adequate and efficient techniques in enhancing cross-cultural competence in the process of training.

Keywords: Cross-cultural competence; innovative potential; methods and models of teaching; didactic organization

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1. Introduction

It is widely known that innovative potential for the application of a competency-based approach in teaching a second and a third language is in the fact that this aspect helps projecting the whole process of education to its final outcomes (Albert, 1993; Sbornik, 2012; Kramsch, 2002). Namely in this case, according to Ter-Minasova (2012), the whole combination of knowledge representation and skills will help to create learning outcomes as its quality standards and in accordance with the professional competency model. Furthermore, it will provide its mobility in a changing world. In this regard Grushevitskaya and others (2003) adds that it will also contribute to focusing on teaching outcomes of the curriculum which become comparable and transparent.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Many researchers believe (Bennet, 1993; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Churikova, 2002) that implementation of a competency-based approach is a complementary factor in maintaining a unified educational, vocational-qualification and cultural-value space, especially in cross-cultural competency. Martin and Nakayama (2000) define intercultural competency (*hereinafter* – ICC) as that “students must develop a competence to consciously share emotional states of another person as well as their empathy, i.e. collect and examine information on the thoughts and feelings of a representative of another culture”. Liaw states that ICC is very important in educational process (Liaw, 2006). Therefore “the competence-based approach to the process of teaching students has a practice-oriented nature, a positive effect on the development of innovative processes in the field of vocational training, allows the development of a more accurate system for measuring the level of intercultural competence” (Liaw, 2006).

In addition, several attitudes to theories and models have confirmed the relationship between a second language acquisition and competency model with the use of interactive technology in the EL classroom. Karasik asserts (2009) that ICC is connected with the two following aspects:

1) the processes of globalization, expressed in the future not only in integration processes towards changing conditions, but also in the expansion of information space; 2) the development of new computer and information technologies” (Karasik, 2009, p.12). The collection (Sbornik, 2012) adds that such approach is very urgent due to “the increase in business and personal contacts, especially if we mean such a multiethnic and multicultural educational society as the Republic of Kazakhstan” (p. 8-9).

Due to increasing intercultural and various professional contacts in Kazakhstan there is a growing need of our community in linguistics specialists who are proficient in three languages: Kazakh, Russian and English. Successful implementation of intercultural and professional interaction involves mastery and professional concepts of the mentioned cultures which determine characteristic aspects of linguistic, cultural, social and business behavior which in turn is determined by the influence of various historical traditions and customs, lifestyles, etc. (Sbornik, 2012). It is noted that Kazakhstan is quite unique in the revision of priorities in the system of teaching different languages that provide mutual understanding, reciprocal respect and mutual acceptability, the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication in the target language of university students. The model of ICC formation of a linguistic identity suggests justification of mechanisms for reflecting culture in the language and speech. We also attach great importance to psycholinguistic features of intercultural communication, ICC structure, principles of its formation in the process of teaching a foreign language, the content of teaching process and a system of tasks aimed at the formation of ICC.

2. Theoretical and Applied Background

As noted in research literature (Albert, 1993; Bennet, 1993; Helfer, 1997), ICC is a kind of ability of a linguistic personality to go beyond their own culture and act as a mediator of cultures but at the same

time not to lose their own cultural identity. According to Hall and Hall (1997), such linguistic personality has a complex structure and is related to the foreign language communicative competency in a rather complicated manner (p.11). It is known that ICC formation occurs not only in the intellectual-cognitive domain but also affects mental and emotional processes.

Therefore, the structure of intercultural competence can include the following components, according to Liaw (2006): 1) a cognitive component (knowledge of their own and other cultures, notions of cultural differences; knowledge of the nature of ethnic stereotypes, their impact on the process of intercultural competency), 2) an affective component (the ability to put oneself in another person's place, to feel the world and the situation from their point of view, and overcome stereotypical emotional reactions to another culture), 3) an activity component (the ability to adequately respond to situations of intercultural interaction; development of behavior models that contribute to resolving difficult situations of intercultural communication; the ability to act not under the influence of stereotypes of consciousness but in terms of a specific situation of communication).

Namely this provision stipulates the integrated nature of tasks aimed at the formation and development of ICC. The effectiveness of assignments, in turn, is achieved by the use of specific principles of their creation and selection which take into account both features of a cultural phenomenon and particular properties of the phenomenon of cross-cultural communication.

Based on the concept "culture" by Hofstede (2010), the present studies suggest the ways to use and produce contents using different tools for the teaching-learning of English as an additional language (L3) in Kazakhstan. That is why in our opinion during the formation of ICC special attention should be paid to the establishment of necessary skills and abilities of students in the study of languages: 1) students must learn to extract socio-cultural, country-specific studies' information (study of history, geography and culture in comparative aspects) from different types of texts and recognize cultural peculiarities; 2) students should develop the ability to adequately understand and treat cultural peculiarities; 3) students should learn to analyze and compare facts and phenomena of the culture of a foreign-language country and their native culture; 4) students must learn to identify whether a cultural phenomenon is universal or specific of the target culture; 5) students should identify if a cultural phenomenon is a fact / reality or stereotype; 6) students must acquire the ability to engage in dialogue about the culture of their native country in a foreign language.

2.1. Peculiarity of intercultural competence

The formation of intercultural competence implies teaching students to different strategies and tactics of linguistic and communicative behavior. It is essential in order to involve students speaking Russian and Kazakh in Kazakhstan in understanding another worldview of people speaking English. In addition, it provides a basis for developing a conceptual framework and values of students. They begin to understand issues of convergence of intercultural distance, be ready to adapt to the business culture of another people, to another socio-cultural context of interaction, and ultimately to the development of an optimal strategy for professional cooperation in another language.

Namely this model allows observing an adequate communicative behavior, mutual understanding of representatives of different cultural communities in dealing with pragmatic objectives and establishing different relationships. Therefore, teaching students to ICC must be based on a holistic concept, which would include the development of cultural standards of business language communication, the ability to differentially use language in changing situations of business communication, business etiquette formula (especially if there are no parallel matches), understanding of the national mentality, etc. It is known that ignorance of features of other cultures in the process of intercultural communication and a lack of understanding of basic socio-cultural factors that promote or hinder the process of communication will not allow forming tolerant relations

between communicants, avoiding a “cultural shock”, preventing conflict situations and, ultimately, will not contribute to an optimal organization of communication process as a whole.

For an adequate cross-cultural understanding and effective interaction we need proportionate dependence between different levels of linguistic, communicative and intercultural competencies. In the case of asymmetry between the above mentioned competencies there can happen misunderstanding since a person who speaks a language is usually expected to have an appropriate level of ICC and is treated as a person who has sufficient social, socio-cultural and cultural information.

In addition, Nurtazina (2012) explored the way to formation the ICC and added that ICC provides for a “correct decoding of presuppositions, background knowledge, values, signals of psychological and social identity” (Nurtazina, 2012). It means that in the structure of the communicative components of a linguistic personality one of the dominant is the behavioral aspect. This opinion is shared by Karassik V. saying that the structure of communicative personality “behavioral aspect is “combination of intentional and involuntary characteristics of speech and paralinguistic means of communication” (Karasik, 2009).

ICC is considered by us from the perspective of three components: 1) the ability to form in oneself a different linguistic identity which implies knowledge of the language, values, norms, behavior patterns of other communicative community; in this approach mastering a maximum amount of information and relevant knowledge of another culture is the main aim in mastering ICC; this problem can be formulated in achieving acculturation, up to the complete rejection of native cultural identity; 2) the ability to achieve success in contacts with representatives of another cultural community, even when there is insufficient knowledge of the basic elements of culture of their partners. Namely this version of ICC is often faced in the practice of intercultural communication; 3) the ability of some members of a cultural community to seek understanding in the process of interaction with representatives of other cultures using different strategies for the prevention of “their won” and “foreign” conflict and create in the course of interaction “a new intercultural communicative community” (Nurtazina, 2012).

3. Methodology and Research Methods. Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to investigate factors and peculiar properties for the formation of intercultural competence in the context of competency model with the use of interactive technology in the EL classroom and identify parameters for the formation of intercultural competence.

- show the need to study the competency approach in teaching a second language;
- analyze constituent components of the competency approach to language teaching (cognitive, activity, affective);
- identify various information technologies that are needed for the formation and development of ICC students;
- demonstrate convincingly the specific principles of creation and selection of materials that take into account peculiarities as a cultural phenomenon, and particularly the phenomenon of cross-cultural communication.

Both primary (interviews and surveys) and secondary research methods (literature review) were carried out to provide empirical material for the analysis of ICC in this paper. The following research tools were used in the research.

4. Conceptual Framework. Parameters for the Formation of Intercultural Competence

In order to master ICC students, future professionals that are ready to enter the globalized multicultural space, must have an understanding of basic intercultural communication theories that explain differences in behavior, lifestyle, business or corporate cultures of representatives of various ethnic communities. The analysis of these theories allows singling out “indicators of cultural diversity

of the business environment” (Crystal, 2003; Spitzberg, 1997) needed in a multicultural environment, and which include: high contextuality / low contextuality, monochronality / polychronality, high / low power distance, individualism / collectivism, masculinity / femininity, high / low level of uncertainty avoidance, cultural literacy. Knowledge of indicators of cultural diversity provides a basis for the formation of socio-cultural and intercultural competency of students studying English for the development of the ability of communicants to engage in dialogue on the basis of the knowledge of their own and foreign cultures. Here ICC is an integral part of the overall social and cultural competence. A number of scientists (Nurtazina, 2012; Gudykunst, 2005) note that the formation of ICC should be seen as a process of acquiring another image of the world that does not conflict with cognitive images and meanings, but rather expands personal horizons of perception of reality tolerantly perceiving another culture.

The model of formation ICC of linguistic personality suggests the following components: first, the justification of mechanisms of reflecting culture in language and speech, second, psycholinguistic specifics of intercultural communication, ICC structure, third, principles of its formation in the process of teaching s language, fourth, the content of the teaching process and systems of tasks aimed at the formation of ICC.

4.1. Formation of ICC as a Comprehensive Educational Process

Many scientists believe (Gudykunst, 2005; Byram, & Fleming, 1998; Spitzberg, 1997) that ICC teaching is a comprehensive educational process in implementing which it is necessary to make every effort to promote understanding of segments of the worldview by various ethnic groups). This can be achieved by the following methods: a) by incorporating authentic materials (texts, poems, songs, videos, etc.) in the teaching process; b) by the use of active forms of teaching (problem tasks, role-play of sociocultural orientation); c) by engaging students in various types of extracurricular work (cultural and regional studies quizzes and competitions, correspondence with a foreign friend, etc.). All these methods are collectively aimed at solving specific problems of acculturation.

In order to achieve an authentic model of behavior in linguistic and non-linguistic levels it is essential to imitate (through watching training videos or updating this factor in the process of artistic communication), as well as “deliberately organizing training, designing situations that stimulate display of patterns specific to some or another linguistic culture, typical intonation patterns, as well as the use of certain speech patterns and clichés that serve as frames” (Nurtazina, 2012, p.215-216). We share Ter-Minasova’s view that “frames and scheme of communicative behavior can be similar in various linguistic cultures as there are universal values, but scripts and scenarios are completely different” (Ter-Minasova, 2012).

Moreover we should understand that the structure of ICC has the following identified components: 1) a cognitive-mental component (knowledge of one’s own and other cultures, understanding of cultural differences, knowledge of the nature of the ethnic stereotype, and its impact on the process of intercultural interaction); 2) a sensitive-affective component (the ability to put oneself in another person’s place, to feel the world and the situation from his point of view, and overcome stereotypical emotional reactions to other cultures); 3) an active component (the ability to adequately respond to situations of intercultural interaction, development of behavior models that contribute to resolving difficult situations of intercultural communication, the ability to act not under the influence of stereotypes of consciousness but in terms of a specific situation of communication).

5. Results and Findings

5.1. Training Phase of ICC

At Gumilyov Eurasian National University (ENU, Astana, Kazakhstan), there is a Laboratory of Applied Linguistics and Intercultural Communication, where there are special classes for teaching English as a foreign language in the form of cross-cultural training, aimed at the development of intercultural communication skills and competence, tolerance, prevention and overcoming of xenophobia and its separate forms for students of different faculties.

As direct methods of forming ICC we use in the EL classroom the following ones: 1) country-specific studies' information and cultural commentary to authentic training courses; 2) methodological manuals with parallel texts, giving an idea of Kazakh-Russian-English cross-cultural differences. For example, a) in the behavioral field (greeting manners, nonverbal means of communication; norms of behavior in everyday life; nationally-specific manners and customs; business etiquette; business protocol; b) in the speech field (basic standards of business correspondence; culture of speech; negotiating (including telephone negotiations); possible topics of conversations, taboo themes; "small talk"; and c) in the area of relationships and perceptions (interpersonal relationships, perception of time and space; individualism and collectivism; attitude to work; color perception, attitude to environment (environmental awareness); stereotypes; perception of social roles of men and women, emancipation issues. The formation of MC requires knowledge of such areas of culture, in which "clash of cultures" is most probable.

That is why group trainings represent, in our opinion, the most appropriate form of work interesting for students and allowing them in an accessible way to integrate norms and principles of the world culture. Training of intercultural communication and competency refers to culturally non-specific programs, i.e. it does not imply the development of communication skills when interacting with representative of a particular culture, but aims at developing in participants of multicultural personality traits (ethno-cultural sensitivity and tolerance, empathy, ICC) allowing a person to successfully communicate with other cultures different from their own.

5.2. Recommended Activities

As one of the most adequate and productive methods to increase ICC of students in ENU we chose the method "a technique to improve intercultural sensitivity; ("Intercultural sensitizer") (Hofstede, 2010), or, using other terms, "cultural assimilator" (Martin, & Nakayama). It is based on the fact that students are offered a number of situations that characterize relations between people in various walks of life. Students must read and choose from a list of answers the one which, in their opinion, is correct. Their main task is to familiarize with the culture of the people of Kazakhstan, which allows them to correctly estimate the behavior of bearers of this culture. It is human nature to observe and evaluate behaviour of other people within the cultural norms and traditions that they learned in childhood. When immersed in a different environment, in a different culture this assessment technique cannot be justified and leads at best to misunderstanding, at worst – to conflicts. The scheme of the training enables representatives of two cultures to know each other. In preparing the training we have descriptions of a few situations that are typical for the host culture and poorly understood by migrants and visitors. For each situation there are 3-4 versions of possible explanations, one of which corresponds to the tradition (the correct answer). Each participant of the training selects the most appropriate training answer from his point of view; then all options are submitted for public discussion and eventually we focus on the correct answer. It is important not only to discuss the answer that corresponds to the tradition of the studies culture, but also pay attention to the multiple causes of human behavior as each of the responses bears the logic and meaning.

Comprehending a "foreign" culture the student, first of all, becomes familiarized with the norms of everyday behavior, adjustable parameters of "accepted – unaccepted" which they take for granted. Therefore, the teacher should not only show rules of everyday behavior of the Kazakhs, Russian and other nationalities living in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan, but also to develop tolerance,

explaining the roots of certain customs or national habits, teach students to see their environment, enrich them with approach to understanding phenomena of life, methods of building interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, etc. In intercultural communication classes teachers focus on such most pressing issues for foreign students as national stereotypes; culture shock and overcoming it; what is accepted and unaccepted to say among Kazakhs or Russians; taboos and imperatives; specifics of the Kazakh and Russian speech etiquette (greetings, addressing a stranger / a friend, compliment, "mobile" etiquette); culture of communication; features of the national mentality of Kazakhs and Russian and their effects on communicative behavior; non-verbal communication, etc.

Comments and a detailed description of each of these principles will help identifying similarities or differences of a native and a foreign culture, which in turn will have a significant impact on the effectiveness and timing of adaptation to the target culture. Gradually the student realizes that their mentality is not the only adequate and correct one, that there is another that has the right to exist. In the classroom we study in detail both reasons and realities generating cultural and unique relationship in the Kazakhstani environment. The best way of teaching how to reach an understanding, is to organize an exchange of ideas within the framework of problem situations, discussions, case studies.

5.3. Using ICT-technology

For the development of ICC and we use such innovative methods as the formation of electronic communication via web services (forum, chat, teleconference, magazines, e-mail) in the target language between teachers and students, between students within the same academic group or within students of other groups, with external foreign partners in group research projects and within the framework of academic mobility of students and teachers.

5.4. Pedagogical Experiments

Types of exercises held in tandem and different algorithms for their implementation advisably complement cognitive operations promoting mastery of a foreign language ICC, in accordance with which students a) identify cultural facts, b) determine semantic associates of a cultural fact and its semantization, c) compare facts of their national culture with similar elements of their culture and language, d) develop a foreign language speech and interpretive skills. Ultimately, all this contributes the real communication in a real mode to present intercultural dialogue.

Since 2014, we have introduced in the learning process such kind of work with students as the use of language corpus which plays an important role in the formation of the communicative competence. Experimental evidence suggests that corpus activities accelerate the development of linguistic competence of students. So, we conducted an experiment with second-year students. The following table demonstrates benefits of corpus exercises and activities in the formation and development of discursive and socio-linguistic components of communicative competence. Corpus studies carried out by students (research tasks) helped to attract students' attention to the strategies of politeness which are relied on by native speakers as part of professional communication. The major basis of corpus texts has been used to improve knowledge of country-oriented linguistic character. The developed skills allowed raising more independent learners who are able to use their own corpus as an effective referral system, as a third compulsory format of language data along with the traditional grammars and dictionaries. It should be emphasized that this is an important contribution to the development of existential competence of students.

6. Conclusion

Thus, the study of any language is the study of relevant national culture. It is on this foundation that we based the idea of multiculturalism in educational documents of the Council of Europe regulating

language policy. In this context competency is a set of dynamic knowledge, skills, abilities and personal qualities that students have to demonstrate upon completion of a part or entire educational program; and ICC is the ability that allows a linguistic personality to go beyond their own culture and acquire qualities of a mediator of cultures without losing their own cultural identity.

We would like to emphasize that ICC does not assume assimilation by students of individual knowledge and skills but their mastery of a complex procedure where for each of the selected areas there is a corresponding set of educational components.

The formation of ICC requires knowledge of areas of culture where the “clash of cultures” is most likely to happen. Therefore, knowledge of techniques, methods and models of language teaching in the Republic of Kazakhstan from the perspective of competence-based approach allows predicting possible communication failures and even avoiding them. Kazakh, Russian and English teachers of Kazakhstani universities in the light of Bologna Convention have an updated task of revising priorities and transition to planning educational outcomes in the language of competencies, methods of their diagnosis and evaluation that promotes an active learning process of students, flexibility and ability to self-directed learning, and this, in turn, will help them with future employment in a highly competitive labor market.

Moreover, active involvement of students in successful communication activities in the social and cultural context of Eurasianism is promoted by the following facts: a) taking into consideration the development of comparative thinking in students in terms of orientation in the phenomena of a lifestyle; b) the way students can recognize and perceive various lifestyles; c) as well as compare these ways of life with the students’ own culture; and d) interpretive skills of active communication from the perspective of cultural determinants of native and other cultures in order to clarify misunderstandings in intercultural communication.

7. Recommendation for Future Studies

As a perspective for further scientific research we can consider various didactic and methodological challenges faced by university teachers: 1) the need to create a holistic view of the culture and people of the countries in which English is an official language; 2) prevention of forming false stereotypes and generalizations about representatives of target cultures; 3) a careful selection of thematic content of culture studies enrichment with means of the English language; 4) co-study of native and English cultures to form a general planetary thinking; 5) formation of social and cultural strategies enabling students to use communication and language in new situations of intercultural communication with representatives of other countries and cultures, as well as enabling students to resolve inevitable cultural conflicts that arise in intercultural communication; 6) the use of English as one of numerous tools for socio-cultural education.

In the future, it is necessary to establish certain criteria for defining the level of formation of students’ ICC: 1) information-cognitive criterion (awareness of cultural diversity as a source of personal growth and development of Kazakhstani society in today’s globalized world; the need to acquire new knowledge about multicultural world, especially the establishment of interpersonal relationships with people of various cultures including the use of Internet technologies; critical attitude towards the information received); 2) emotional value-oriented criterion (focus on humanistic universal and domestic cultural values in their behavior; tolerant attitude towards speakers of other cultures; presence of emotionally-colored positive interest in different cultures, intercultural interaction, including by means of Internet technologies); 3) practice-oriented criterion (application of acquired knowledge and behavior norms in a cultural heterogeneous society; possession of acquired and developed models, programs, patterns of behavior and communication in intercultural interaction, including in the web; the ability to solve intercultural conflicts, including in the web).

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