

Arctic Component in Language Teaching as a Factor to Improve Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract

The authors consider the abilities of the Arctic component in languages and literature teaching in a higher educational institution of culture and arts as a factor to improve the students' intercultural communicative competence. The functioning Russian Federal State Standard of Higher Education is aimed at implementing the competency approach, which, in turn, provides for widespread use of active and interactive teaching methods in the educational process, new educational material, and creative approach to teaching methods. They also underline the role of introducing the Arctic component into the content of language courses in growth of student's language personality, since representatives of different nationalities living in the republic, including indigenous peoples of the North, are studying at the Arctic State Institute of Arts and Culture. Most students are bilingual or trilingual persons communicating Russian and native languages. Detailed description of teachers' development of educational manuals for the students of the Arctic State Institute of Culture and Arts is given, which is intended for simultaneous solution of several problems – teaching, developing, and educational.

Keywords: Education, Russian and foreign languages teaching, multilingualism, content of language education, the Arctic component, intercultural communication, communicative competence, language personality, manuals, students of culture and arts institution.

1. Introduction

Contemporary challenges, which humanity is facing, have led to the innovation processes in higher education around the world, including Russia. Training of competent experts, able to achieve the most efficient results in their field and to improve further vocational skills and professional mobility, is a priority of the modernization concept of the Russian education.

This involves the language education upgrade. The general communicative competence and the culture of business communication require Russian and foreign language proficiency for a contemporary expert, which determines their competitiveness.

The functioning Federal State Standard of Higher Education is aimed at implementing the competency approach, which, in turn, provides for widespread use of active and interactive teaching methods in the educational process, curriculum content of the new educational material, and creative approach to the teaching of disciplines. Cognitive activity of students should be organized in a way to engage all participants of the educational process in an active dialogue, communication, exchange of knowledge, ideas, and constant interaction. The participants of the dialogue learning acquire such competence as the skills of business communication, critical thinking, information analysis, making an informed decision, participating in discussions, the ability to work in a group.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 The objective

How to ensure the language education to shape the students' communicative competence more effectively? Does the introducing the Arctic component in the content of language education increase students' motivation in learning languages?

It is known that any knowledge becomes significant only when it gains personal meaning for a person. To achieve this, the content of language education should address the emotional sphere of personality, and motivate a person. It should stimulate active expression of own attitude, making the role of a bystander impossible. How is this performed within the walls of our institution?

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Overall review

To accomplish the task in the cycle of language and humanities disciplines, which are taught in the Arctic State Institute of Culture and Arts (ASICA), the regional Arctic component was included. Introducing the Arctic component in the content of education is stipulated by the language situation in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and the mission of the Institute.

The Arctic State Institute of Culture and Arts is a leading institution of culture and arts in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). The Institute was established in the city of Yakutsk in 2000. For the fifteen years the Institute found its niche in the educational space of the Russian Federation. It has shown itself as a young dynamically developing higher educational institution.

Since 2003, the Arctic State Institute of Culture and Arts has entered the world educational space, joining the University of the Arctic - an international non-governmental Open University, which aims include sharing experiences and educational resources, developing the educational and research cooperation between higher schools in the Arctic region of the world. Thanks to a membership in the University of the Arctic, the students of ASICA take an opportunity to participate in various educational programs, including the exchange program "North to North" (North2North).

Educational and scientific activities of the institute are aimed at the preservation, study and development of cultural identity, promotion of creative, cultural values diversity of indigenous peoples of the North and the Arctic, creating the conditions to meet the ethno-cultural educational needs of peoples of Russia. A distinctive feature of education in ASICA is that the students are able to cognize the cultural values in direct contact with the masters of the spiritual heritage of the peoples of the Arctic, not leaving their native ethnic and cultural environment.

The cultural landscape of the Arctic is a diverse phenomenon. Its study may be possible by means of interdisciplinary approaches and methods. The unity in diversity is a feature of cultural expression in the Arctic (Vinokurova, 2014). The purpose of introducing the Arctic component in teaching language disciplines is to increase students' intercultural communicative competence. This allows for emphasizing person developing purpose as a basic one.

The results of the questionnaire carried out in the Arctic State Institute of Culture and the Arts showed that most of the students of our institute are bilingual, and some even multilingual. Although mostly the students have grown up in the national language environment, but in the institute they are trained in Russian. In addition, the students have the desire to improve their Russian, as well as learning a foreign language, and even two foreign languages. Thus they have an aspiration to multilingualism.

In recent years, the intensive exchange of information via the languages of wide interethnic and international communication has increasingly become important, among which there is the Russian language. Professionals in various fields are interested in mastering languages, speech skills improvement. The skills to speak well, eloquently and convincingly, to express competently one's thoughts in Russian or foreign language are necessary to everyone.

However, many of people find difficulties in mastering languages. They have to feel frustration and embarrassment all their lives long because of their inability to write and express their thoughts properly and fluently. This is especially true for people of other nationalities who are not native speakers of Russian or foreign language.

3.2 Within the discipline "The Russian Language and Culture of Speech"

The discipline "The Russian Language and Culture of Speech" was one of the compulsory federal subjects for non-

philological specialties from the late 90-s of XX century. This course is aimed at enhancing the non-philologists' level of practical knowledge of the modern Russian literary language, as well as to assisting students in developing the basic skills of effective verbal behaviour required of any professional profile for successful work.

Teaching this discipline in our republic is complicated by the fact that the Russian language is not native for the majority of the students.

According to A.I. Yatsikevichyus, "mixing and mutual interference of languages are evident in all the states of formation and functioning. These interferences do not differentiate thinking, but they produce jargon languages, they complicate improvement of writing speech that can adversely affect the overall development of a personality" (Yatsikevichyus, 1970). This creates the situation when a person can speak neither perfect Russian nor his native language as he mixes the words of both.

Mostly school leavers or graduates from provinces of the republic enter the Arctic State Institute of Culture and Arts. Speaking the Russian and Yakut languages are presented rather heterogeneously in the republic: in the cities and in the centre of the republic the Russian language dominates. In other areas, local people speak mostly the Yakut language. The results of the Unified State Examination (CSE) on the Russian language in the schools of Yakutia show weak graduates' practical training: an inaccurate understanding or understanding with the distortion of content and perspective of the source text in the task of the C part of exam, lack of sense of wholeness, logic and coherence of presentation of the original text, inaccurate usage, poverty of vocabulary, and monotony of grammatical structure of speech.

All above mentioned suggests that high demands are imposed to the discipline of "The Russian Language and Culture of Speech" at the national higher educational institution. In our opinion, the communicative orientation of the course is the main thing. Therefore, in our institute an attempt was made to create an educational aid (a textbook) in which the priority would be given to learning to communicate.

The basic idea of the aid has much in common with the concept of the communicative foreign language education of E.I. Passov (Passov, 2007). To some extent the structure of the educational material is based on the type of the textbooks of Russian for training foreigners. If in the Russian universities the normative aspect of speech culture is a priority, the national universities require more in-depth attention to communicative aspect. In other words, it is necessary to pay special attention to expanding and extending vocabulary of students. This task could contribute to the organization of educational material in the form of so-called lexical (speech) topics involving vocabulary learning, which would include descriptive and expressive language units. Cultural approach to classroom language teaching requires the use of the Russian language texts, which familiarize the students with the culture of the native, Russian and other peoples, bring respect for them. It is essential to pay attention not only to native and to Russian culture but also to universal culture. Based on the knowledge of the native language and culture, we create a bilingual and multilingual personality able fluently communicate in native (Yakut, Even, and Evenk), Russian and foreign languages (Sannikova, 2012).

3.3 *Within the discipline "Ethno-linguistics"*

Further the work on the educating the multilingual person is going on during the learning of other professionally-oriented language disciplines, such as "Ethno-linguistics".

In the process of studying this discipline it is advisable to involve students' mother tongues as research material. The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is a multinational republic. According to the 2010 Census, it is home to more than 120 nationalities. Among them 466,492 Yakuts (48, 67%), 353,649 Russians (36, 90%), 21,008 Evenkis (2.19%), 20,341 Ukrainians (2.12%), 15,071 Evens (1, 57%).

In 1992, the law was passed "On languages in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)". The Yakut language on a par with the Russian is one of the official languages of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Five languages of indigenous peoples of the North (Even, Evenk, Chukchi, Dolgan, and Yukagir) in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) received official status.

These languages belong to different families and groups. The Russian language belongs to the Slavic group of languages, included in the Indo-European family. The Yakut and Dolgan languages are representatives of the Turkic group, and the Even and Evenk languages are of the Manchu-Tungus groups that are included in the Altaic language family. The Yukagir and Chukchi languages are Paleo-Asian languages. The interaction of these very different languages in the same region has been and is the material for comparison. Considering that, besides these languages, the present linguistic situation in the republic is represented by foreign languages learned in secondary and higher schools, as well as languages of migrants, we can talk about the situation of multilingualism. Thus, the region itself is a very interesting for ethno-linguistic research.

As the result of the teaching experience of the given discipline in the Arctic State Institute of Culture and Arts, we

have created a tutorial "Ethno-linguistics" intended for future experts in the field of traditional culture (Sannikova, 2014).

The tutorial is our attempt to analyse the ethno-linguistic concepts, based on the materials of the languages of the North. We have developed a training manual which has originally been created as a collection of tasks and exercises for practical training on ethno-linguistics, primarily on the Russian language. But soon we have realized that students are more interested in the assignments related to their native languages: Yakut, Even, Evenk, and others. Moreover, many of the tasks of the textbook are based on the research works of students on comparing languages: Russian and Yakut, Yakut and Even or Evenk, Yakut, Russian, and English.

Thus, bilingualism, and sometimes multilingualism of students, provides an opportunity to consider the concept of ethno-linguistics on the material of various languages. The dialogue of cultures in teaching ethno-linguistics promotes the formation and development of the bilingual students' intercultural competence. It presents them the diversity of linguistic pictures of the world, the value of different cultures. It learns the culture of friendship and communication in a multinational state and brings up tolerance.

3.4 Within the discipline "Foreign Language"

Foreign language course in the "non-linguistic" university has a communicative feature. That is, first of all, aims at establishing and improving communication skills. In present day world the collective activities on implementing the scientific, industrial and other tasks have a vital role and require the ability to communicate in a foreign language as well.

In addition, mastering a foreign language enables students to meet their educational needs of various kinds, i.e. is of comprehensive value.

Learning a foreign language, a student gets an idea of the culture of its country, traditions, customs, beliefs, ethnic and cultural features of communication, a certain amount of social and cultural background knowledge. It has a great educational significance as well, as it helps further to avoid or overcome the "cultural shock". In the process of socialization each person develops a lot of verbal and non-verbal ways of communication inherent in their culture. The student is guided and acts in everyday situations with these ways. In the condition of another culture this system of orientation becomes inadequate and a person can experience "cultural shock", which is dangerous because it can lead either to a negative evaluation of his own culture or to intolerance towards a foreign culture.

"In a strange way most people are not aware of themselves as a product of their own culture. Moreover, within own culture the illusion turns up that our vision of the world. Our mentality is the only acceptable. Such a cultural barrier is much more dangerous and unpleasant than a language one" (Ter-Minasova, 2000).

Difficulties that a person experiences in a foreign cultural environment are the result of lack of knowledge, experience and practical skills that can be gained by targeted training.

"An attempt to generate interest and respect for other cultures, overcoming a sense of irritation from redundancy, failure or simply differences of other cultures is especially important now, when the mixing of peoples, languages, cultures reached a record level" (Ter-Minasova, 2000).

When intercultural communication going on different cultural and linguistic reality is always cognized with the images of one's own culture, which in this case is realized and reinterpreted in new ways. Besides a certain ethno-methodological view is developed that also has an educational value, as it allows better comprehending and understanding of native culture (Furmanova, 1994). A monolingual and mono-cultural person has no "conflict of cultures", but, unfortunately, the student does not deal with the "dialogue of cultures". If a person has no chance to compare anything, he is not able to assess adequately.

Many researchers also suggest a link between the teaching culture and personal growth. It is believed that people feeling comfortable in more than one culture are intellectually and emotionally more satisfied with their lives than mono-cultural individuals.

Being experienced and skilled in cultural contacts, persons are more able to overcome the problems of life, as it contributes to human adaptive capabilities.

Much depends primarily on education in the family. A number of problems are solved in preschools and secondary schools. Adults, coming to a higher educational institution, are experienced enough. However, in the process of getting higher education, gaining new knowledge and skills, new ways of orientation in the world leads to the appearance of new features and abilities, a new attitude to oneself, to people, and to the world as a whole.

As it is known, the world's language model is due to a person not only individually, but collectively, as the linguistic human consciousness is due to customs, traditions and way of life of the ethnic community which he belongs to, that is to culture in its broadest sense. Integration of culture in the process of foreign language learning requires its study not only on the cognitive and communicative levels, but also on the intercultural one when one culture comes into contact with

another, and their specific features become especially evident (Furmanova. 1994).

The specific feature of the subject "Foreign Language" at the institute of arts is primarily a counterpoint of interconnected, integrated goals - educational, cognitive, developmental, and upbringing.

A language as a bearer and conservator of cultural traditions of people is a means which actively forms a person.

Foreign language teachers of our department developed manuals "The Culture of the Arctic (The Arctic: Cultural Reader)" for English classes (Alekshev. 2012), "Decouvrir l'Arctique" to practice the French language (Zimina, 2012). These manuals have been analysed by the Far Eastern Regional Training Centre experts and have been recommended to publishing and can be used in the teaching process, not only in our institute, but also in other educational institutions of the Far Eastern Federal District. Both manuals were awarded with the special diplomas "For the integration of the Arctic component in the content of foreign language education" in the field of Philology in "Gold Coryphaeus" in Rostov-on-Don II International competition of teaching methods, educational and scientific literature published in the academic year of 2012-2013. The French manual has also passed examination in the educational and methodical association of universities in the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation in 2014 and it received the Russian mark.

Each tutorial includes texts about the features of the environment, culture, traditions, customs, and life of the peoples inhabiting the Arctic. The manual is divided into six parts: "The Arctic is our home", "Indigenous peoples living in the Arctic", "Traditional occupation of the peoples of the Arctic", "Minorities living in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)", "The beliefs and traditions of the peoples of the Arctic", and "Modern topical issues in the Arctic".

Each part includes 3-5 units. Each unit consists of pretext questions, text, vocabulary, tasks on comprehension of main ideas and details of the text, grammar and speech tasks (questions for discussion). Since the manual consists of an interesting material for students, close to their life, it makes them want to read, understand, find similarities and differences in the cultural traditions of the peoples, compare and express their own thoughts.

Learning foreign languages and cultures of native speakers would not be complete without a study of literature. Teaching discipline devoted to the study of literature in the national institute of culture and arts, where the majority of students are bilingual or multilingual, must be built on the principle of complementarity, aimed at the development and deepening of intercultural and communicative skills.

3.5 Within the disciplines "Russian Literature" and "Foreign Literature"

Courses of literature in such institution should alternate review and monographic material, which will provide an overview of the subject and highlight individual works and their authors.

When studying literature in a higher educational institution we must remember that the Russian and foreign literatures developed in close connection and influenced noticeably each other. The traditional study of literature at the higher educational institution alternates courses of the Russian and Foreign Literature. However, the Russian Literature has constantly interacted with national literatures, including the Yakut literature.

In rural national schools pupils usually learn the Russian and Yakut literature, while foreign literature is studied in much smaller quantities. In urban schools the Russian literature is mostly studied and to lesser extent – foreign literature, while many urban schools do not often have national literature as a school subject.

This fact encourages the development of methods of teaching literature in a higher educational institution aimed at the development of intercultural communicative competence and deepening knowledge, taking into account the level of the school course mastery of literature.

This technique should introduce the Arctic component into the process of studying literature in a way of including the review material on literature of the peoples of the Arctic region, as well as including national literature of the peoples of Russia, in particular Yakut, Even, Evenk, Chukchi, Dolgan, and Yukaghir literature. Such a course should be directed at identifying the relationship between authors and literary works of the Arctic region, as representatives of the common space of the Arctic in the global literary process.

There is no doubt that in addition to the introduction of the Arctic component it is necessary to deepen the knowledge of the Russian and foreign literatures, taking into account the level of literature knowledge and communicative skills of students. Attention is drawn to the fact that more students are motivated to study foreign literature in parallel with the material drawn from their native ethnic and cultural picture of the world, because the students perceive the literature of other countries and peoples through the prism of their language and culture.

At the same time, we take into account the fact that for many students the Russian language is not native, but as mentioned above, there is a desire to improve the level of proficiency in Russian.

In this regard the presentation of material in the classroom on foreign and Russian literature should be aimed at further improving and strengthening skills of communication coupled with assimilation of literary content. The interactive

course that includes colloquiums, individual tasks on the analysis of reading, mini-conferences on topics passed, and quizzes, can fully highlight the issues and provide an opportunity to demonstrate and develop communication skills.

Concerning the study of the Russian literature of the Arctic region, we can assume in this case the amendment, as the students of ASICA are representatives of the peoples inhabiting the Arctic zone of Russia.

This gives them an invaluable advantage in studying native literature and in carrying out scientific research in this area, interactive classes on the subject.

These studies can be used in the preparation of materials for educational manuals for both teachers and students.

The comparison of the linguistic material and cultural analysis of the rules of communication in Russian, native and foreign languages, analysis of the characteristics of cultural and national psychology of contacting cultures and socio-cultural context of the situation in order to develop communication skills, to analyse the validity of other cultures, to compare and transfer the results to their own culture is the main educational and pedagogical purpose of intercultural education. As a result of this transfer, there appears a meaningful picture of the world in which there is a place of cultural diversity, care and respect for their own culture and other cultures (Furmanova 1,994)

4. Conclusion

Thus, the students of different nationalities living in the republic, country and abroad, including representatives of indigenous peoples of the North study in the Arctic State Institute of Arts and Culture. Most students are bilingual persons communicating Russian and native languages (Yakut, Even, Evenk, and Koryak). The education is held in Russian which is the official state language of the Russian Federation. Students are also taught foreign languages (English, French, German, and Italian). The Institute is a multinational multicultural educational institution that has an impact in the process of learning, especially in learning Russian and foreign languages.

Introduction of the Arctic component in the process of learning the language disciplines is one of the conditions of improving intercultural communicative competence of the students. In addition, it allows us to solve several problems at the same time - teaching, developing and educational.

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