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Major Approaches to Teaching a Foreign Language to Humanities-Based Students in the Context of Cultivating the Subject Component of Their Professional Development

Principales enfoques para la enseñanza de un idioma extranjero a los estudiantes de Carreras Humanísticas en el contexto de cultivar un componente temático de su desarrollo profesional

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ABSTRACT:

Amid the radical changes taking place in the sphere of higher professional education, what is having increasingly greater value today is the professional and personal development of the nation's future workforce. Changes taking place in many areas of society are bringing about new requirements for college graduates, with an increasingly greater focus being given to the subject component of their professional development. Thus, there is relevance in exploring various approaches to cultivating a modern model of personality during the process of professional education. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and compare some of the major approaches to teaching a foreign language in the

RESUMEN:

En medio de los cambios radicales que tienen lugar en el ámbito de la educación profesional superior, lo que hoy tiene un valor cada vez mayor es el desarrollo profesional y personal de la futura fuerza laboral de la nación. Los cambios que se están llevando a cabo en muchas áreas de la sociedad están dando lugar a nuevos requisitos para los graduados universitarios, con un enfoque cada vez más grande que se le da al componente sujeto de su desarrollo profesional. Por lo tanto, es pertinente explorar diversos enfoques para cultivar un modelo moderno de personalidad durante el proceso de educación profesional. El propósito de este trabajo es analizar y comparar algunos de los

context of cultivating students' subject position. The authors focus on 2 specific approaches to teaching a foreign language: communicative and linguo-culturological. The study's findings help reveal the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches, leading to the conclusion that in seeking to achieve the objectives of cultivating students' subject position by means of a foreign language it is hardly possible to go with one particular approach. In the authors' view, the most efficient approach is to make harmonious use of certain elements of each of the approaches in a selective or integrated fashion – depending on the situation.

Keywords: foreign language, educational activity, students' personal development, communicative approach, linguo-culturological approach, principles, communicative competence, sociocultural competence, motivation

principales enfoques para enseñar un idioma extranjero en el contexto de cultivar la posición del sujeto de los estudiantes. Los autores se centran en 2 enfoques específicos para la enseñanza de un idioma extranjero: comunicativo y Linguo-culturológico. Los hallazgos del estudio ayudan a revelar las fortalezas y debilidades de ambos enfoques, llevando a la conclusión de que al tratar de alcanzar los objetivos de cultivar la posición de los estudiantes por medio de un idioma extranjero es difícilmente posible ir con un enfoque particular. En opinión de los autores, el enfoque más eficaz consiste en hacer un uso armonioso de ciertos elementos de cada uno de los enfoques de manera selectiva o integrada, dependiendo de la situación.

Palabras clave: lengua extranjera, actividad educativa, desarrollo personal de los estudiantes, enfoque comunicativo, enfoque Linguo-culturológico, principios, competencia comunicativa, competencia sociocultural, motivación

1. Introduction

The objective in teaching a foreign language (hereinafter 'FL') to Humanities-based students is, above all, to enhance the skills and proficiencies needed for successful communicative interaction in that language in an academic field.

In light of changes in the objectives and content of teaching, and motivating students to learn a FL, teaching practice was supplemented with the communication-oriented approach, which is grounded in an orientation toward mastering a language as a means of communicating in real-life situations in which learners may be involved (Council of Europe, 1996), with grammar and vocabulary viewed as a means of achieving communicative objectives. In accordance with recognized educational standards, the focus is on 2 major language competencies (general and communicative). Note that the term 'competency' implies a pre-set requirement to educational preparation.

Communication-oriented FL learning is a promising dimension that meets the needs of modernity and may be viewed as a means of achieving the end objective of learning, which is learning a language as a means of communicating and gaining insight into the culture of native speakers of that language and their psychology.

College pedagogics is currently undergoing a shift to the humanistic paradigm, which is focused on human personality, particularly the development of learners' subject characteristics as the elements of their subject position. Right now, the issue of subjectness holds a central place in research into the Humanities and is becoming one of the major strands of research into psychological-pedagogical mechanisms underlying professional-personal development.

This study is focused on 2 major approaches to learning – communicative and linguo-culturological. These approaches are in alignment with the model for cultivating students' subject position through FL learning, which implies nurturing an active and well-developed personality, fostering a world-view, motivation, and creative initiative, and helping attain effective communication skills.

The communicative approach is specifically aimed at developing one's capacity for communicating. Oral communication may be construed as "an activity involving two (or more) people in which the participants are both hearers and speakers having to react to what they hear and make their contributions at high speed" (Johnson & Morrow, 1992, p. 70).

The communicative approach has found a practical embodiment in foreign and domestic teaching packages utilized in teaching a FL to foster varying levels of communicative competence. The implementation of the communicative approach is grounded in the use of 4 major macrostrategies, which are as follows:

1. Creating favorable conditions for learning. The first strategy is predicated on a well-known theory whereby it is not really possible to teach someone a language – it is only possible to create the conditions under which the learning process will be taking place. Ensuring these conditions is not limited to just providing curricula and textbooks, as learning is a two-way process. Conditions favorable for learning may be created both by instructors and by students.

2. Using speech situations created by students. Here, the instructor and students are co-participants in discussing various situations. The instructor must not ignore the student's initiative.

3. Cultivating meaningful interaction between the participants. This macrostrategy implies deliberate interaction in a 'student–student' and 'instructor–student' fashion during the process of communication. Meaningful interaction makes it possible to engage the various types of student speech activity. This kind of strategy offers the opportunity for students to deliberately strike a conversation in a FL with all other participants in the communication process.

4. Activating students' heuristic abilities. This strategy is centered around the idea that the student, who possesses certain heuristic abilities, makes a number of comparisons and generalizations and transfers template collocations into other speech situations (Hedge & Whitney, 1996, p. 241).

When it comes to the implementation of the communicative approach, researchers normally focus on 6 major principles of organizing student learning activity, which are as follows:

1) the principle of organizing learning activity in a communicative person-oriented fashion;

2) the principle of mandatory use and rational combination of algorithmic heuristic learning activities as part of teaching verbal communication;

3) the principle of arranging collective learning activities in classes attended by the entire language student group with a view to cultivating relevant skills and proficiencies;

4) the principle of teaching the various types of speech activity in an interlinked fashion factoring in their characteristics and using accelerated speech perception learning techniques;

5) the principle of arranging the learning process in a cyclic manner;

6) the principle of rational use of the native language in teaching a foreign one (Haycraft, 1996, p. 95).

The most crucial and significant principle is the 1st one, as it actualizes the communicative orientation of learning as a whole. To substantiate this principle, it is necessary to analyze what the communicative person-oriented organization of learning activity is about.

The communicative organization of learning a FL presupposes 3 major conditions:

1. Student learning being oriented not toward gaining language knowledge but toward developing the skills (grammatical, lexical, phonetic, and verbal), which may ensure the possibility of engaging in verbal activity when communicating and employing one's language skills in acts of communication.

2. The 2nd condition, which deals with the actualization of the principle of communicative organization, presupposes the communicative nature of exercises used in the learning process to cultivate student communication skills and verbal proficiencies (the principle of situational verbal communication). Researchers have suggested that it helps to employ exercises of various levels and have recommended using higher-level ones, which are designed to help one assimilate the language material and develop

verbal skills by taking part in real-life communicative situations and therefore perfectly match the paramount objective of learning – developing communicative competence.

3. Fostering in students the stimulative-motivational aspect of activity – cultivating the need for verbal communication in a FL. This may require a great deal of positive motivation, for a) no verbal activity whatsoever can commence without motivation and b) the very efficiency of verbal activity is greater when positive motivation is high (Stepanova, 2012, pp. 38–39).

Thus, ensuring the communicative nature of learning activity requires organizing it with a focus on the learner's personality, i.e. taking a learner-centered approach. In other words, it helps to take account of their "personal individualization" (selecting learning material and setting objectives by reference to the personality of each student) (Littlewood, 2010).

The communicative approach to teaching a FL is often the object of criticism due to the fact that it forces students to make mistakes, especially grammatical ones. Some researchers are suggesting that such mistakes may be caused by 2 major reasons. The 1st reason is that students may have been taught by an instructor who believes that making accidental errors in grammar or pronunciation is perfectly OK. The 2nd reason is that students may be engaged in a verbal situation for which they are not prepared and may, therefore, make some mistakes along the way (Brumfit & Johnson, 1991).

The *linguo-culturological approach* emerged as a result of language starting to be viewed as a cultural phenomenon. Based on this approach, language is not a speaker's activity but a readymade product that they assimilate in a passive manner. It is something specific amongst the inhomogeneous diversity of facts of verbal activity. Language exists thanks to an agreement between members of a team. Each team, each group, and each people has its own language, which reflects its character, traditions, customs, etc. Language orders the total experience of all members of a certain language community. These views were formulated by American linguist B.L. Whorf, who advocated the idea that our speech reflects our vision of the world – a prism through which speakers see it (Maslova, 2001).

Linguists have used specific examples to illustrate the significance of the verbal modeling of the world in different languages. The language picture of the world is determined by lexical, grammatical, and syntactic structures. The functions of language (the primary one being the communicative function) allow speakers to not only exchange information and express their thoughts by putting together verbal messages but also model the picture of the world, for, as is suggested by Whorf's hypothesis, each language has its own metaphysics and its own picture of the world which is substantiated both by its lexical make-up and by its grammatical-syntactic structure (Hammerly, 1985).

Consequently, learning a FL incorporates the sociocultural element which helps comprehend the content of learning and makes it possible to learn a language with all its specific rules, norms, and verbal traditions. This kind of learning method expands the potential for mastering a language through real-life experience and boosts student interest in learning a FL.

Thus, the present-day concept of learning a FL is characterized by an aspiration to not only provide students with the necessary language tools but also cultivate in them a cognitive store that would help foster in them a sense of cultural communion with native speakers of the language. This being said, real facts and conceptual notions relating to a foreign culture, all which makes up sociocultural competence, will be assimilated by a student who is a carrier of concepts, notions, and values mastered during the process of socialization in their own culture.

Consequently, in reality, sociocultural competence, fostering which is viewed today as one of the major objectives in learning a FL, is turning into polycultural competence as a result of the inevitable interaction between one's native culture and the one whose culture is being assimilated.

The sociocultural component of the content of FL learning presupposes students getting familiarized with the nation's cultural and everyday-life characteristics, communication style,

norms of behavior, and etiquette. Researchers focused on methods of teaching a FL rightly believe that communicative competence incorporates several subcategories, one of the most significant and communicatively relevant of which is discourse competence, which presupposes knowledge of various types of discourses and rules for constructing them (Sukhobskaya & Vdovina, 1993).

In present-day linguistics, discourse is construed as a complex communicative phenomenon that, along with text, incorporates certain extralinguistic factors (speakers' knowledge and notions of the world, mindsets, and objectives) that are crucial to comprehending a text properly. Discourse competence is a broader field of activity than its text counterpart (the ability to perceive, comprehend, and create text), since, along with purely linguistic skills and proficiencies, it also presupposes a mastery of a sociocultural registry, which is construed as a set of typical and specific speech formulas and communicative models or structures that have been tested socially and those which concentrate in themselves the speech experience of participants in communication.

Fostering intercultural competence during the process of learning a FL facilitates the cultivation of the practical skills of communicating with representatives of other cultures, which helps minimize the chances of the feelings of representatives of other cultures getting hurt and lay the groundwork for partnership and mutual understanding (Ter-Minasova, 2000).

Intercultural communication is a specific process that involves active interaction between people who represent different cultures and languages. The process of interaction between 2 or more partners representing various linguocultures may be complicated by a set of obstacles – physiological, linguistic, behavioral, psychological, and culturological. These obstacles are governed by the differences in mentality and national character, cultural stereotypes, axiological orientations, humor, and forms and means of non-verbal communication used in different cultures.

The above culturological obstacles are setting FL instructors the task of working out a proper intercultural communication agenda, for, amid Russia's re-entry into the world community and, consequently, the orbits of various other cultures, some speakers may have considerable difficulties communicating with foreigners as part of intercultural interaction. To help students minimize these difficulties, FL instructors ought to employ all of the potential laid down in existing learning materials, as well as seek to create such materials, with a view to fostering intercultural competence in their students (Kumaravadivelu, 1994).

The definite strengths of the linguo-culturological approach are that it helps expand students' cultural ken, familiarize them with the target nation's traditions and etiquette, promote the interlinked learning of all linguistic aspects, foster an aspiration toward dialogue across cultures, cultivate a sense of tolerance and respect toward other nations, explore the interrelationship between a language and the character and culture of its native speakers, and focus on the creative, informative, and problem-based nature of FL instruction.

However, the approach has a few imperfections as well. For instance, it is not always possible to provide learning material in a linguo-culturological context, with instructors expected to have a proper culturological training background and thorough preparation for each class required, which may require considerable expenditure of time on the instructor's part.

2. Methods

The purpose of this study is to conduct practical comparison of the communicative and linguo-culturological approaches to teaching a FL in the context of cultivating students' subject position.

In terms of implementing the communicative approach, scholar H.G. Widdowson suggests utilizing the following types of play: a) games based on observation (and memorization); b) games based on interpretation (and guesswork); c) games based on individual or group cooperation; d) tabletop games (Widdowson, 2011).

Based on this, in implementing the *communicative approach* the study's practical portion involved using the following game templates over the course of several classes:

1. The students are told that they will witness an event which they will have to remember and describe in detail later on. Then they are briefly (e.g., for 5 seconds) shown a colored slide. Each student individually writes down what they remember. The instructor then arranges the students into small groups to have them do some matching. Lastly, the slide is shown to them again to elicit their comments, have them compare their reports, and engage them in a discussion.

There is an alternative procedure which presupposes forming the groups upfront, letting each group have a brief look at the slide, and then having the students do some discussing. Afterwards, each group receives another group's image and starts asking them questions.

2. The students are given a poorly focused colored slide that is designed in such a way as to let one discern just some of the clots of light in it. In pairs, the students speculate on what they may be looking at. Then the focus is slightly adjusted. The students again engage in a discussion, which may involve some of them changing their former opinion. The procedure continues until the slide becomes sharply focused.

3. The students sit in a circle – no more than 10 individuals. One of them starts the procedure off by saying their name and a fictitious occupation (e.g., I'm Nikolai and I'm a welder). The next participant has to repeat that information (i.e., You're Nikolai and you're a welder) and add the info about themselves (e.g., I'm Olga and I'm a reporter). The game continues until it collectively comes back to "Nikolai", who will have to repeat the entire sequence. It is apparent that the procedure lends itself to an almost unlimited number of variations, since the "occupation" may be replaced with just about any other piece of information, real or fictitious (e.g., I like it, I hate it, I'm here, etc.)

4. The use of tabletop games. Before you use one, you may need to consider the complexity and utility levels of a game as an activity related to learning a language. Before the game starts, the players pick a card with an image or a word on it. They take turns throwing the dice and, accordingly, move their tokens. If a token hits 'What' (a square), they take a card from the 'What' stack that contains a question that has to be joined up with the information about their image or word – and they have to answer that question. If the answer satisfies one's partner (or one's group), they will let the card stay. The winner is the player who ends up having the largest number of cards – not the one who finishes first.

The implementation of the *linguo-culturological approach* in teaching Humanities-based students is predicated on the use of the culturological potential of literary works in a FL in practical FL sessions.

Notwithstanding that reading literary works in a FL is, traditionally, a priority for students majoring in FL, the authors have found in practice that carefully selected short stories, some abridged to fit into 4–6 pages, with an exciting, dynamic plot may serve as quite an effective learning material for non-language students.

Apart from the culturological realities of the nation, whose language is being studied, explicitly featured in literary works, and the substantial advantages of students working with these works (e.g., the possibility of assimilating lexical and grammatical material in a situational and at-ease manner and great opportunities in terms of being able to share one's thoughts on what has been read, which may result in the end in an expansion of students' communicative competence), the authors also took notice of the culturological potential implicitly expressed in those works.

They developed special study guides for student independent work at further, more advanced levels of study as a way to foster intercultural competence. These study guides are comprised of short stories by well-known English and American writers and incorporate a set of objectives,

developed on the basis thereof, for the cultivation of student language competence in all its manifestations – lexical, grammatical, verbal (oral and written), and sociocultural.

The selected short stories are characterized by a focus on certain moral-ethical issues that are crucial to the nation, like love of one's motherland, observing national traditions, raising kids in a family, developing their talents, and defining one's life's priorities and moral values.

In discussing these issues – particularly, when responding to the question 'What would you have done if you were the story's main character?' – students focus on the differences in mentality and national character, as well as the axiological orientations and cultural stereotypes followed by the stories' main characters, who represent the English-speaking world as opposed to the Russian-speaking one. This helps foster a firm life philosophy and cultivate intercultural competence.

The last section of the methodological part for each story in the guide is called 'Cross-Cultural Competence Check', or 'Cross-Cultural Study'.

Having analyzed the factual material of each story, the authors singled out in them the phenomena and realities which are characteristic of English-speaking nations and which students should be conversant of. Cross-cultural and culturological competence is cultivated in learners through certain assignments, like having them fill in the blanks in a sentence, finish a sentence using one of the proposed lexical units or phrases, or combine a lexical unit with a piece of information that relates to it.

It is worth noting that the overwhelming bulk of the material based on which assignments within this section of the guide were put together was borrowed from the Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture (Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture, 2006). Since these guides are designed for independent work, students may, if need be, use the Internet to search for the right answer.

Below are 2 examples of assignments in English that are designed to test a student's intercultural competence (based on A.M. Burrage's short story 'The Waxwork').

Choose the correct item to complete the sentences.

1. The Madame Tussauds museum in London contains wax models of _____ people.

   a) dead

   b) living

   c) both living and dead

2. The museum's first exhibit was _____.

   a) a wax model of Isaac Newton

   b) a wax bust of Mary Tudor

   c) a wax head of Marie Antoinette

Accordingly, when it comes to the guide's section called 'Cross-Cultural Study', an assignment designed to provide an insight into certain intercultural realities may be worded as follows (based on Kate Chopin's short story 'A Pair of Silk Stockings'):

Did you know that

   • the word 'mall' denotes different things in the UK and the US?

   This is followed by various instances of usage of the word in British English and its American equivalent. Here is another example (based on H.H. Munroe's short story 'The Open Window'):

Did you know that

   • the word 'rector' has different meanings in different countries?

This is followed by instances of usage of the word in England, Scotland, and the US.

The guide's assignments on combining lexical units with relevant information are based on 'Lord Mountdrago' by W.S. Somerset (the titles of government posts in the US and Great Britain) and 'The Polish Duel' by R. Sabatini (terms used to denote people who are invested with various titles in the countries of Europe).

Another attempt of linguoculturological approach to FL teaching has been undertaken by one of the authors in several editions of study guides for Intermediate and Advanced students comprising authentic American and British short stories. The original texts have been specially processed and supplied with relevant assignments focusing both on language issues and on various aspects of the English speaking world of the USA and Great Britain. For instance, cross-cultural assignments concerned such realities as "borough", "apartment", "Manhattan", "Brooklyn", "account", "wholesale grocery concern", "Pall Mall", "interest in a plantation", "sportsmen", "council house", etc. (Bobrova, 2012, 2015, 2017).

3. Results

The results of the experimental work conducted in carrying the communicative approach into effect revealed the following:

- the use of educational games predicated on observation may improve learners' communicative abilities and memory during the process of learning a FL;

- educational games predicated on interpretation and guesswork may help enhance the ability to put together a correctly worded statement depending on the situation and specific case;

- educational games predicated on individual or group cooperation may facilitate the development of monological and dialogical speech;

- tabletop games may help one learn to think in a FL and develop one's memory during the learning process.

As part of the experimental work, an attempt was also made to help cultivate in students a cognitive store that would help foster in them a sense of cultural communion with native speakers of a language and, consequently, help them overcome the intercultural barrier and ease the pressure felt when communicating with native speakers. The study's findings revealed that students' sociocultural competence is developed based on their study of the national culture of countries whose language they are learning. They start seeing the potential difference between their native culture and other cultures and may gain the skills needed to overcome the sociocultural differences and take account of the cultural and country-specific characteristics of various nations.

The study's findings led to the conclusion that in seeking to achieve the objectives of cultivating the subject component of students' professional development by means of a FL, it is hardly possible to go with one particular approach. In the authors' view, the most efficient approach is to make harmonious use of certain elements of each of the approaches in a selective or integrated fashion – depending on the situation.

4. Discussion

A particular area of application of the research results is FL in the academic sphere. Among the more efficient ways to enhance the skills required for successful communicative interaction in a FL is motivating students to write papers in that language on a particular research topic and give presentations at various scholarly conferences. Such methods yield better results at more advanced stages of FL instruction. Special attention is devoted to the development of the ability to present the findings of one's research both in oral and in written form.

On the one hand, writing various documents related to written scholarly communication – like

abstracts, synopses, or papers on a topic based on a research study of one's own – may substantially boost one's motivation for further research, as well as help learners familiarize themselves with major international standards and requirements as to writing the above scholarly documents. On the other hand, giving a presentation at a conference in a FL may facilitate overcoming some of the psychological barriers impeding successful communication, which may be viewed as a kick-start for activating one's potential and tapping the hidden reserves of one's mind.

Achieving this objective may require that the instructor take account of a number of factors, the most significant of which are the characteristics of members of the audience. One of the major challenges instructors are faced with is varying levels of command of the FL. The fact that the audience features learners with varying levels of language competence may require taking an individual approach to each of its members, which may be reflected in the preparation of assignments that vary in complexity – especially in the initial stages of work.

A significant role in enhancing students' language competence is played by the use of unlimited resources available on the Internet to ensure one's further professional and personal development. While searching for materials related to their diploma research, students are most certain to make use of English-language resources as well – they may use relevant online services, like social networks, chats, and corresponding by email, to engage in communication with their foreign counterparts.

Many present-day students are quite motivated learners who may be regarded as all-round individuals keen on continuous professional development. Many seek to get as thorough a handle on the study material as possible and use it for their professional growth and career success. At the same time, to them learning a FL is also a way to improve further, which is a formula for both professional and personal success.

5. Conclusion

As a result of their analysis of some literature and use of certain teaching techniques in practice, the authors came to the conclusion that in seeking to achieve the objectives of cultivating students' subject position by means of a FL it is hardly possible to go with one particular approach. In the authors' view, the most efficient approach is to make harmonious use of certain elements of each of the approaches in a selective or integrated fashion – depending on the situation. Each of the above approaches has certain flaws and may require further elaboration and enhancement, which offers prospects for further research in the area.

To sum up, it is worth noting that FL teaching ought to be inclusive of a number of relevant factors and predicated on taking an individual approach to each learner. Harmonious interaction between the instructor and learners is a formula for success in achieving the paramount objective – enhancing one's skills in communicating in a FL.

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