

UDC [378.016:811.111]:008

DOI: 10.12958/EPS.2(163).Fedicheva_N_V

Fedicheva N. V.

THE CULTURAL COMPONENT IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN UKRAINE

Most teachers of English as a foreign language would agree that their job is not just to teach language skills, but also to teach culture. Many language educators support the inclusion of a cultural component in the teaching of English. They give the following arguments for having a cultural component: it promotes international understanding, deepens an understanding of one's native culture, and motivates learners to do better in English. M. Byram describes the language teacher's role as "a professional mediator between a student and foreign languages and cultures" [1, p. 58].

Many Ukrainian, Russian, British, American, Turkish, and other methodologists devoted their research works to teaching/learning culture. The reasons of the raised interest to this issue can be determined by the following factors.

Firstly, language methodologists and teachers realize that language and culture are intertwined. According to D. Brown, "whenever we teach a language, we also teach a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting" [2, p. 64].

Secondly, educators realize that the mere learning of linguistic system is no guarantee of successful cross-cultural communication.

Thirdly, both teachers and students have come to recognize the importance of valuing other cultures in the world beyond their own.

The more I research, the more I realize the importance of developing cultural competence when teaching and learning a foreign language, especially today, when we all are part of the Global Village.

The objective of this article is threefold: (1) to outline some problems that educators in Ukraine face while teaching for cultural understanding; (2) to argue in favor of the role of students' own culture in English language teaching; and (3) offer ideas on how to infuse cultural goals into a proficiency oriented curriculum.

To illustrate and elucidate the issues raised, I will be using my own research findings as well as the data I have collected by conducting surveys and doing observations in English language classrooms.

My article *Problems in the Teaching of Culture*, published about 8 years ago, defines several reasons why language courses will not include a systematic study of culture. These reasons are as follows: (1) some teachers are not trained in the teaching of culture; (2) good quality authentic materials are lacking; (3) the definition of culture can be a source of difficulty; (4) teachers are lack of significant first-hand knowledge of the country they teach about; (5) the study of culture involves extra time that many school teachers and university instructors cannot spare; (6) cultural materials receive uneven treatment in the textbooks; (7) teachers often think that students will be exposed to cultural material later. But "later" never comes for most students.

Several years later this situation changed in better way. I came to the conclusion that the first three issues were not very critical any more. Nowadays, teachers of foreign languages are trained in the teaching of culture and therefore they are aware of different approaches to teaching for cultural understanding. Besides, good quality authentic textbooks are available in abundance in our bookstores and as most teachers have access to the Internet, they can access authentic texts and materials. Finally, the definition of culture no longer seems to be a source of difficulty in designing the instruction process, because numerous publications, seminars and conferences.

On the other hand, some new problems have arisen. Probably both "old" and "new" problems can partially explain why some teachers are reluctant to integrate culture into their language teaching thus making culture a weak component of our curricula. However, what is the Ukrainian students' reaction? The surveys I have

conducted among university students revealed that they want their language courses to emphasize cultural awareness as well as linguistic concerns. The surveys conducted with university students shown that the primary reasons for their learning English were an interest in the culture, literature and arts of English-speaking countries and a general interest in the way of life in these countries. Nearly 86% of the respondents wrote that they realized the benefits from learning about another culture. All of these students understand that the study of culture is a very important aspect of language learning, but at the same time they state that cultural teaching is insubstantial and sometimes sporadic. Why is this so? Two possible reasons are given below.

Firstly, some teachers still use the “facts-only” approach to culture. Many foreign language professionals and scholars believe that the teachers’ role is not to deliver facts, but to help students attain skills necessary for making sense out of the facts they themselves discover in the study of the target culture (V. Galloway, N. Seeley, A. Hadley). The teachers stress that the objectives to be achieved in cross-cultural understanding involve processes rather than facts. In Seeley’s view, facts are cheap and “meaningless until interpreted within a problem-solving context” [13, p. 3]. A. Hadley (1993) notes that the “facts-only” approach to culture that allows the goal to collect information is “destined to be ineffective” [6; p. 358]. A focus on “facts” has been criticized by many scholars. The experience of teaching English leads to the conclusion that the “collection” of facts might establish stereotypes, and, even worse, it leaves students unprepared to cultural situations they have not studied yet.

A solution of the problem could be the following: teachers of English as a foreign language need to equip students with tools for processing new culture in a way that will facilitate their understanding. Teachers also have to develop and use tasks associated with training students to be careful observers of culturally appropriate interactional routines and expressions. The latter can serve as a basis for productive and effective activities and techniques that will be motivating and interesting for students.

Secondly, we still do not have a viable framework for the organization of foreign culture. Many English language teachers in Ukraine face the challenges of teaching for cross-cultural understanding, however, this struggle will be successful only if the goals are determined and the aspects of teaching/learning culture are defined. They realize the need for a scheme that would help them select appropriate cultural material and serve as a useful resource for planning cultural instruction and designing their own cultural activities. For educational purposes we have modified the scheme suggested by R. Lafayette. The modified scheme consists of the following groups.

Group 1. Factual objectives: students will be able to demonstrate the knowledge of formal or “high” culture, and knowledge of everyday or “popular” culture. Students will be able to explain main historical events, traditions, and masterpieces. They will also recognize everyday cultural patterns.

Group 2. Affective objectives: students will be able to value different peoples and societies.

Group 3. Process objectives: students will be able to generalize and organize information about both foreign and native culture, and evaluate the validity of statements about culture.

Group 4. Pragmatic objectives: students will be able to notice/pay careful attention to everyday politeness, expressions, and phrases used by speakers or hearers, and then identify the cultural reasons for the use of these language devices. They will learn to act appropriately in common everyday situations, and use appropriate gestures.

The proposed scheme can be helpful in clarifying themes and topics and materials that are to be integrated into classes. It can also give teachers some ideas about strategies and techniques to be used to integrate culture with language study.

Many scholars believe that cultural content of courses of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) should include opportunities to learn about one’s own culture in relation to other cultures. They also stress that the study of one’s own culture during foreign language classes allows students to be aware of it and, as a result, keep their

cultural identity in cross-cultural communication. Among the scholars who support this point of view are R. Horshkova (Ukraine), I. Cakir (Turkey), S. McKay, L. Smith (USA), Yun Wei (China).

More than thirty years ago, the American language methodologist L. Smith (1976) said: the fact that English became an international language means that English no longer needs to be linked to the culture of those who speak it as a first language. Rather, the “purpose of an international language is to describe one’s own culture and concerns to others” [14, p. 41]. I believe that English speaking culture and local culture should be viewed in comparison and contrast to one another. Students have to learn and expect differences as well as to understand and appreciate their logic.

I analyzed about twenty textbooks adopted in Ukraine as course books in both secondary and high school. Among these course books are: *Enterprise*, *Opportunities*, *Cutting Edge*, *Headways*, *Upstream*, and others. The analysis revealed that the majority of characters in these books are Western, born in Great Britain, the USA, Canada, and Australia. The other characters are from France, Germany, India, Nigeria, Philippines, and Netherlands. Thus the cultural content in teaching English as a foreign language is limited to several countries where English is the primary/second language or has a special status. It is interesting to note that a Ukrainian English textbook recommended by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education, uses only English-speaking names such as Amanda, Chris, Terry, Melinda, Charlie, Daniel, Steve, though the setting in most cases is Ukrainian or neutral, for example, grammar explanation.

In order to get clear idea about the condition of teaching English, I conducted the survey among secondary school students. Answering the question if they could give a brief view of the Ukrainian culture in general or its certain aspect, more than 73% of the respondents said “no”. The percentage of those who answered “no” among senior university students was 54%. During investigation, which was conducted among the students of 2nd and 3rd years of study, 85% of them stated that one of the purposes of learning English was the ability to communicate their own

culture to other people through the medium of English. Nearly 89% of students said they were sure that cross-cultural awareness of both native and foreign cultures would allow them to achieve their professional, social and personal goals.

Let us consider several ideas on how to infuse cultural goals into a proficiency-oriented curriculum. Firstly, we shall look at the technique called culture capsules. The technique was developed by H. Taylor in 1970, but unfortunately it is difficult to find the examples of its implementation in use in any English language textbook that is being used in Ukraine. A culture capsule is a short description of one minimal difference between a Ukrainian and a target-culture's custom, accompanied by pictures, photos, slides, or objects. In the classroom, students can perform role-plays based on various capsules.

Culture Capsule 1: Giving Gifts

Do you know when people in the United States give gifts? Most people wait for special occasions like birthdays, wedding anniversaries, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Bridal Shower, Baby Shower, and Christmas. Then they give big, expensive presents. Many people, especially teenagers and college students, also like to give inexpensive, funny, "just because" gifts to their friends. ("just because I like you" or "just because I think you'll like this").

Adults usually bring a small gift – like flowers or a box of sweets when they go to someone's house for dinner. And, of course, everyone brings back souvenirs when they travel to another country.

Group work. Ask and answer the questions.

When do people in Ukraine usually give gifts? Are there any special occasions for giving gifts in Ukraine? Is it a local custom to give a gift "just because"? What gifts did you give this year? Who did you give gifts to? What gifts did you get this year? What was your favorite gift? Who gave it to you?

Culture Capsule 2: Greetings

In China, a popular greeting is “Have you eaten already?” There are also other expressions for saying “hello” in Chinese. Such greetings as “Where are you going?”, “Are you busy?”, “What are you doing?”, “Are you going to work?” and others also mean “hello”. A Chinese person asking these questions does not really want to know where his friend is going or what he is doing. The Chinese person just wants to demonstrate a friendly attitude to another person.

Group work. Ask and answer the questions.

Are there similar greetings in other languages? How do Ukrainians greet each other in everyday life? Americans usually say “hi”, “hello”, “how are you doing?” What kind of answers/responses do Americans give? Why do Americans ask you “How are you?” and then do not listen to the answer?

Secondly, we look at intercultural connections. Intercultural connections are very short situations that describe the cultural content of a target-language country. Students work in pairs or in small groups. They discuss the situation and create and present conversations based on the situation.

Intercultural connection 1: In a supermarket

In American supermarkets it is very common for cashiers to say to customers “How are you? Did you find everything you need? When the transaction is complete, the cashier will say “Have a good/great day and come again.” Cashiers communicate with the customer in order to build a relationship.

People in the USA also strike up conversations with strangers in the streets.

Group work. Ask and answer the questions.

Would this happen in Ukraine? Do strangers often strike up conversations in Ukraine? If they do, what things might they say? Give some examples.

Intercultural connection 2: Birthday Party

In the USA, if friends or family members inform the restaurant that it is someone's birthday, a birthday cake with candles will be brought to the table and the waiters and waitresses will sing Happy Birthday.

Group work. Ask and answer the questions.

Is this a custom in your country, too? What other things are done to celebrate someone's birthday in public places and at home? How did you celebrate your last birthday?

Thirdly, we look at critical incidents. A critical incident includes a story about a cross-cultural miscommunication with a subsequent set of questions. Having read the story, students will be asked to choose the best interpretation of the characters' actions based on their knowledge of the characters' cultures. As in real life situations there might be more than one explanation that can be considered appropriate or correct. Students then discuss their options in small groups. Critical incidents can be also defined as case studies or culture mini-dramas. They should be based on real-life experiences.

Critical incident 1: A Misunderstanding over a Cup of Tea

A Kenyan man, who went to the USA to study at University, married an American girl. Six years later he came back to Kenya with his wife. When his Kenyan friends visited him, he was very happy to see them. While he and his American wife were entertaining their guests, he offered them some tea and biscuits. His friends said they would like some tea. The Kenyan man went to the kitchen to make the tea and his wife remained with the guests to become better acquainted with them. Suddenly the friends looked offended, excused themselves and left the house before the tea came.

Group work. Ask and answer the questions.

Could it happen in your country? Does a man prepare tea or food for guests in your country? Do you know people who find it offensive for a man to help his wife? In the USA, when a man makes tea for his guests, it is a way to express love and respect for his wife. What about your country? The Kenyan man had learnt the American way. Did he use it at the right time? Why do you think his guests refused to take tea with him and his wife? Would this happen in your country? The friends were offended because the man (not his wife) was going to serve them tea. In Kenya men do not prepare tea or food.

Critical incident 2: Hand-kissing

University instructors from Selcuk university in Konya, Turkey, came to Ukraine to attend a conference that was held at a University. Their Ukrainian colleagues did their best to welcome the guests and they organized for them meetings with the faculty, department chairs, deans, and, of course, students. A meeting with the dean was very interesting and informative. When the dean was saying his good byes, he kissed the Turkish female hands.

Later, the Turkish ladies told a Ukrainian colleague that they were very surprised that the dean had kissed their hands.

Group work. Ask and answer the questions.

Do men kiss ladies' hands in your country? Why do you think the Turkish ladies were surprised? Hand kissing is a very important and traditional gesture in Turkish culture. It is a way of greeting a person significantly older than you are. But in everyday life hand-kissing is very rare. Is it the same in your country? On Turkish religious holidays children kiss the hands of their grandparents, expressing their respect for them. How do Ukrainian children show respect for their grandparents?

Incorporating culture into language teaching can contribute significantly to developing students' practical English skills, building their awareness, and facilitating cross-cultural communication. Despite a lot of research works exist, culture is still a weak component in most curricula in Ukraine. English language teachers do face problems when they try to include culture elements in their language teaching. This research suggests a framework for organizing instruction around cultural themes, which consists of four groups. The framework can serve as a useful resource for teachers as they plan cultural instruction and design cultural activities/materials of their own. It is worthwhile to note that local culture should be taught along with the target one. The ways of infusing cultural goals into a proficiency-oriented curriculum are suggested. These techniques truly integrate culture with language study and are interesting and enjoyable for students. They teach culture along with speaking, listening and reading, thus representing the

connections between language and culture. Further research in this area should deal with the investigation of the methods and approaches to involve students in cultural heritage and traditions of the target country.

References

1. **Byram, M. S.** Language Teachers, Politics and Cultures. Clevedon: *Multilingual Matters*, 1999. (eng)
2. **Brown, D. H.** Teaching by Principles: an Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy. *Longman*, 2000. (eng)
3. **Cakir, I.** Developing Cultural Awareness in Foreign Language Teaching. *Turkish Online Journal of Distant Education – TOJDE*, 2006. 3, Vol. 7, Article 12. (eng)
4. **Galloway, V. D.** Communicating in a Culture. ACTFL Master Lecture Series, Monterey, CA: *Defense Language Institute*, 1984. (eng)
5. **Grishkova R.** Social and Cultural Hindrances to the Formation of Students' Cross-Cultural Communicative Competence. *Philology series*. 2011. Vol. 89(2), 169 – 172. (eng)
6. **Hadley, A.** Teaching Language in Context. *Heinle & Heinle Publishers*, 1993. (eng)
7. **Lafayette, R.** Integrating the Teaching of Culture into the Foreign Language Classroom. Singerman, ed. *Toward a New integration of Language and Culture*. Middlebury, VT: Northeast Conference, 1988. (eng)
8. **Marianne, C.** Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language. *Heinle & Heinle*, 2001. (eng)
9. **McKay, S.** Western Culture and the Teaching of English as an International Language. 2004. *Forum*, 2, vol. 42. Pp. 10 – 15. (eng)
10. **Omaggio, H. A.** Teaching Language in Context. *Heinle & Heinle*. 1993. (eng)
11. **Richard-Amato, A. P.** Making It Happen. *Longman*. 1996. (eng)

12. **Scollon, R.** Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach. 2nd ed. *Blackwell Publishers*, 2001. (eng)

13. **Seeley, H. N.** Teaching Culture: Strategies for Intercultural Communication. Lincolnwood: *National Textbook Company*, 1984. (rus)

14. **Smith, L.** English as an International Auxiliary Language. *RELC Journal* 7 (2). 1976. (eng)

15. **Yun Wei.** Integrating Chinese Culture with TEFL in Chinese Classroom. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 2005, 7, vol. 2 (Serial No. 19). (eng)

Федічева Н. В. Культурний компонент у навчанні англійської мови як іноземної

У статті порушено питання про невід'ємність навчання культури та мови, досліджено деякі проблеми, з якими стикаються викладачі у викладанні англійської мови як іноземної в Україні. Автор висуває аргументи на користь включення вивчення власної національної культури студентів у навчанні англійської мови. Подано дані, зібрані автором у процесі аналізу підручників та здійснення спостережень. Так, автор надає аналіз найбільш поширених підручників (*Enterprise, Opportunities, Cutting Edge, Headways, Upstream* та ін), що затверджені Міністерством освіти України, і визначає їхній потенціал в ознайомленні студентів із культурою і традиціями інших країн.

Запропоновано ідеї щодо включення культурних цілей у навчання мови. У статті подано приклади використання таких прийомів, як капсули культури, які було розроблено Д. Тейлором у 1970 р., проте рідко використовуються в підручниках з іноземної мови, міжкультурні зв'язки та змодельовані автором критичні ситуації.

Ключові слова: культурний компонент, схема, рідна культура, інструменти для роботи з новою культурою, капсула культури, міжкультурні зв'язки, критичні ситуації.

Федичева Н. В. Культурный компонент в обучении английскому языку как иностранному

В статье поднят вопрос о взаимосвязи изучения культуры и языка, исследуются некоторые проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются преподаватели в процессе преподавания английского языка как иностранного в Украине, и выдвигаются аргументы в пользу включения изучения собственной национальной культуры студентов в обучение английскому языку. Представлены данные, собранные автором в процессе анализа учебников и осуществления наблюдений. Таким образом, автор представляет анализ наиболее распространённых учебников (Enterprise, Opportunities, Cutting Edge, Headways, Upstream и др.), утверждённых Министерством образования Украины, и определяет их потенциал в ознакомлении студентов с культурой и традициями других стран.

Предложены идеи относительно того, как включить культурные цели в обучение языку. В статье представлены примеры использования таких приемов, как капсулы культуры, разработанные Д. Тейлором в 1970 году, но редко используемые в учебниках по иностранному языку, межкультурные связи и смоделированные автором критические ситуации.

Ключевые слова: культурный компонент, схема, родная культура, инструменты для работы с новой культурой, капсула культуры, межкультурные связи, критические ситуации.

Fedicheva N. V. The Cultural Component in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Ukraine

The article discusses the inseparability of culture and language teaching, explores some challenges that teachers of English as a foreign language in Ukraine face today in terms of developing cultural understanding, and argues in favor of the inclusion of students' own culture, in our case Ukrainian cultural phenomena, into English language teaching practices. With this publication, the author continues her decades-long exploration of the problem of raising cultural awareness in the context

of foreign language teaching/learning, thus enriching its studies with a retrospective longitudinal analysis.

The data that the author has collected by conducting surveys, analyzing textbooks, and doing observations are presented. In this regard, the author provides the analysis of the most popular textbooks (*Enterprise, Opportunities, Cutting Edge, Headways, Upstream*, etc.), approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, and defines their potential in familiarizing students with the culture and traditions of other countries.

Ideas on how to tangibly infuse cultural goals into language teaching are offered. These include determining the objectives of culture teaching, selecting on their basis appropriate cultural material, and introducing the techniques of cultural instruction. The latter are represented, for example, by culture capsules developed by D. Taylor in 1970, but quite rarely used in textbooks, as well as by intercultural connections and critical incidents, designed by the author.

Key words: a cultural component, a scheme, local culture, techniques.

The article was received by the Editorial Office on 10.12.2013

The article was put into print on 28.03.2014

Peer review: Hagerty, G., Doctor of Education