



Linguistic and Cultural Identity of the University Students

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Abstract

A modern higher education institution is an example of such educational environment where representatives of different nations communicate and collaborate. The success of the mutual activity depends on the awareness of the interlocutors' culture, their own communicative abilities, the previous experience and skills of intercultural communication. This paper attempts to show various aspects of interpersonal communication and interaction of the students with diverse language, cultural and religious background. Some issues of the linguistic and cultural identity of the students, their adaptation and assimilation are examined. Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University) is an example of multinational, multicultural environment where young people from many countries study. The common educational environment provides great opportunities for the internalization and socialization of the students and their mutual understanding of the current realities. The practical experience of teaching and training the representatives with diverse language norms and cultural traditions is presented. The findings of the paper are supposed to contribute to further understanding of the ideas of linguistic and cultural Identity of the young people studying at the higher education institutions and to ensure the efficacy of these concepts.

Keywords: higher education, linguistic and cultural Identity, intercultural communication, multinational educational environment;

1. Introduction

Contemporary educational environment is characterized by its multinational character. The programs of academic mobility give a student many opportunities to study in various world universities with different languages of instruction and cultural traditions.

An individual getting into a new cultural system usually has an intension to be integrated into the new society with a specific culture and social rules. The socialization takes place through the assimilation of social norms and values. The language (especially a foreign one) is one of the ways of this integration.

On the other hand, the importance of the integration in a new society overlaps with the need to keep the individual's native cultural identity.

2. Methodology

Any person can be considered as a stable integrity of socially significant features that characterize an individual as a member of a particular society with a specific system of social relations and culture. Language and cultural identity is a product, a subject of history, culture development. The intellectual ability of a person is most intensively manifested in the language and is examined through the language [1].

The practice of teaching a foreign language should take into consideration the learner's linguistic identity that is connected to the development and use of a certain sign system. In this sense, the linguistic identity is a composition of linguistic abilities, skills, and willingness to implement speech acts of various degrees of complexity. The linguistic identity includes the characteristics of motives and goals, the intention to evolve a student's personality and his/her behavior.

When studying the language identity, the axiological, cognitive and behavioral aspects of this concept are focused on, it complies with the value, cognitive and pragmatic levels of the language identity [2].

The value constituent of the person includes the values of ethical and pragmatic norms of behavior typical of a certain ethnos in specific time. These norms are fixed in the moral code of the people; reflect their historical and general views united by one culture and language. These norms are expressed in the universal utterances, the communicative strategy of politeness, and the meanings of words.

The cognitive aspect of a person is revealed by analyzing the picture of the world. Here, the substantive ways of interpreting reality connected to the individual's certain awareness of the world and language, are distinguished.



The behavioral (pragmatic) aspect of the language identity is characterized by a specific set of speech characteristics and paralinguistic means of communication. These include the speech signs of men and women, children and adults, educated and less educated native speakers. There are also such signs of communication as: the distance between the interlocutors; the voice volume and the distinct character of pronunciation, the choice of words etc. Any deviation from the stereotype is perceived as a signal of unnatural communication, as a sign that an interlocutor belongs to another culture [3].

When a foreign language is learnt, a "secondary linguistic identity" can be developed. It can be viewed as a combination of a person's ability to learn foreign languages at an intercultural level, which means the adequate interaction with the representatives of other cultures and an effective participation in intercultural communication.

The creation of a secondary linguistic identity is associated not only with the verbal code of a foreign language and the ability to use it in communication, but also with the "picture of the world" typical of the native speaker of this language and a particular society [4].

In conditions of intercultural communication, a secondary linguistic identity is realized within the framework of a dialogue of cultures. Consequently, learning a foreign language is related to the awareness of a corresponding national culture, which involves not only the assimilation of cultural knowledge (facts of culture, ethnic and religious specifics of learners), but also the formation of the ability to understand the mentality of the speakers of the language under study, and the awareness of the communicative behavior of people in the country.

At the same time, linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the national culture should be accompanied by the development of the non-verbal behavior standards. The background knowledge serves as an indication of the skills and abilities, the national cultural component of the vocabulary, non-verbal means of communication, rules of communication, social symbols. The trainees must be taught how to use the language material, its background and nonequivalent vocabulary.

The secondary linguistic identity of a foreign language interlocutor is formed under the influence of the primary linguistic identity, based on the person's native language.

However, in the conditions of multinational Russia, a contradiction arises between the native language, i.e. the language in which a child begins speaking with his mother, and the language that a 5-6 year old child is aware. In this connection, when choosing the language of instruction in an educational institution, the concept of "a mother tongue" is replaced by the notion of "basic functional language". It means that the child's proficiency level of the languages is almost the same, it makes very difficult to distinguish languages into native and non-native.

The trainees are constantly forced to live in the circumstances of two different sociocultural communities as far as the multicultural educational environment of a modern university is concerned, it also seems important to take into consideration the situation when the learner considers the Russian language as not native.

Training a foreign language in this case is carried out with the support of the main functional language of the mediator, while the communicative orientation of instruction implies the exchange of information in conditions of the combination of more than two sociocultural communities. It is essential that the students understand these differences; they can determine and explain the motives and attitudes of the individual that belongs to the community with a different system of values.

A good example of multinational and multicultural environment is the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University). Here the youth from 155 countries study at bachelor, master and post graduate programs. They all speak their mother tongues and have their cultural background. One of the main goals of the University is to help these students to be integrated into the Russian educational environment of the higher education institution. As the language of instruction in most educational programs is Russian, the students can preliminary learn the Russian language at the Faculty of Russian Language and General Educational Disciplines. Here the young people get acquainted with the in-house rules of learning and professional training of the University, socialize with the students from other countries, learn the history and the culture of Russia. The preliminary study at the faculty usually lasts for 10 months (one academic year) 36 hours a week. Special short-term training programs for trainees and masters (3-4 months) are also available. Besides the linguistic and cultural studies, the learners also get the basic knowledge of the subjects of their profession-to-be. After classes, the students get an opportunity to go sightseeing in Moscow, Moscow region and other cities and towns of Russia. As a result, on completion of the preliminary course, the students get socio-cultural adaptation to the social and intellectual environment of the university, to Moscow and Russia as a whole. What is more as the students' group consists of the learners from different countries the students learn about the customs and traditions of other foreign countries.



The students can perfect their Russian language skills and improve their knowledge of the Russian culture studying at bachelor, master and postgraduate levels. They also have an opportunity to study English as a second foreign language and German, Spanish or French as the third foreign language. Finally, the foreign students perceive themselves as an integral part of the Russian culture and their deep involvement in the social life of the university prompts the idea of the students' second linguistic and cultural identity. What is more, many foreign students express their intention to continue their professional career in Russia after graduation.

On the other hand, the students' affection and love to the mother tongue and culture is always supported. At classes, the students from one country are very often grouped in a small team where the learners with a better level of language proficiency help their fellow students with a lower level of the language proficiency to understand the instructor and to cope with the assignments. Moreover, all students always participate in a great variety of projects connected with the national issues. The university regularly holds the festivals of various national communities where the foreign students present national cultural traditions and customs, show national dances, cook their favorite dishes. This way the learners from other countries save their national linguistic and cultural identity.

3. Conclusion

The above convinces us that learning a foreign language in a multicultural educational environment of higher school should provide the communication of cultures.

Accordingly, the content of the training includes various issues for discussion connected with different culture.

Appropriate training materials are needed to integrate relevant technologies into the educational environment.

Numerous learning methodological complexes, created by the native speakers, should include original materials on the traditions of peoples speaking the students' languages, offer tasks for discussing the cultural values of different generations, the sociocultural problems of modernization and globalization; examples of the language and culture integration, ethno-cultural features of verbal or non-verbal communication, etc.

The development of linguistic and cultural identity is carried out through the components of communicative competences: linguistic (theoretical knowledge about the language), language (practical language skills), discursive and socio-linguistic (language use in accordance with the communication situation, the skills of correct speech behaviour), cultural (entering into the culture of the target language, overcoming the cultural barrier in communication).

Regular and systematic activity on the awareness of cultural specific features of the students from various countries, the improvement of their communicative skills in the "basic functional" and foreign languages can support the students' language and cultural identity and provide the conditions of the development of their second language and cultural identity.

References

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