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UNDERSTANDING CULTURALLY CONDITIONED BEHAVIOR: SOME COMMON TEACHING TECHNIQUES

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Розуміння носіїв іншомовних культур: прийоми навчання

Вчені та викладачі підтримують включення культурного компоненту в процес навчання англійській мові. Дана стаття стосується причин сьогоденного інтересу багатьох вчених та викладачів до питання щодо ролі культури у навчанні мові. Включення елементів культури у процес навчання мові може підштовхнути розвиток практичних навичок володіння англійською мовою у студентів, що полегшую міжкультурну комунікацію. Автор даної статті пропонує ідеї щодо питань включення культурного компоненту в програму професійної підготовки спеціалістів. У даній статті містяться десять методик, які сприяють кращому розумінню особливостей поведінки людини у культурному середовищі зарубіжних країн.

Ключові слова: прийоми навчання, міжкультурна комунікація, культурний компонент, підготовка спеціалістів

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Понимание носителей иноязычных культур: приёмы обучения

Учёные и преподаватели поддерживают включение культурного компонента в процесс обучения английскому языку. Данная статья рассматривает причины сегодняшнего интереса учёных и преподавателей к роли культуры в обучении языку. Включение элементов культуры в процесс обучения языку может послужить толчком для развития практических навыков владения английским языком у студентов, что облегчает межкультурную коммуникацию. Автор статьи предлагает идеи по вопросам включения культурного компонента в программу профессиональной подготовки специалистов. В статье содержатся десять приемов, которые способствуют пониманию особенностей поведения человека в культурной среде зарубежных стран.

Ключевые слова: приемы обучения, межкультурная коммуникация, культурный компонент, подготовка специалистов

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].

Research publications on the problem of teaching for cultural understanding have been written by many Ukrainian, Russian, British, American, and other educators. The reasons for their interest might be the following:

Firstly, language educators and teachers realize that language and culture are intertwined. As D. Brown said, „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.

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

The objective of this article is offer ideas on how to infuse cultural goals into proficiency oriented curriculum.

Ten teaching techniques that we believe will promote understanding of culturally conditioned behavior are given below.

A culture capsule is a short description, usually one or two paragraphs in length, of one minimal difference between a local and a target-culture custom, accompanied by illustrative photos, slides, or realia. The technique was developed by Darrel Tayler, a foreign language teacher, and John Sorensen, an anthropologist. The technique can be used for independent study, in small groups or with the full class. Culture capsules may be written by teachers or students.

To construct a culture capsule, Seelye suggests the following steps:

1. Select a topic of cultural contrast, coordinating it with topics being treated in the textbook.

2. List differences and similarities between target culture and local culture customs in relation to this point of contrast.
3. Define student learning objectives.
4. Organize and outline specific content.
5. Write the capsule in language that will be comprehensible to the students who will use it (i.e., at an appropriate level of proficiency).
6. Check the accuracy of the content and language of the capsule with a native speaker and / or other colleagues.
7. Rewrite as necessary.
8. Prepare or collect appropriate multimedia aids (visuals, slides, artifacts, realia, etc.) [7, p. 176].

The teacher may wish to record the capsule on tape for students to listen to as a group or independently, or the capsule may be read aloud, either by the teacher or by a student. The students might also read the capsule in class or as a homework assignment, or follow along with a printed script as the capsule is presented orally. Another alternative is to have students form small groups, with each person in the group responsible for reading part of the narrative to the others. Such an activity affords good practice in listening comprehension and speaking skills. Among the follow-up activities Seelye suggests are those below:

1. Students perform role-plays based on the capsule, with situations and/or scripts provided by the teacher.
2. Groups of students write role-plays based on the information in the capsule.
3. Individuals or groups write new capsules on closely related topics, creating a „culture cluster”.
4. Individuals or groups research and report on related topics of special interest suggested by the capsule.
5. The content of the capsule is integrated into language-learning activities, such as listening and reading comprehension exercises, communicative oral exercises, and written follow-up activities (dictation, rewriting, short compositions, resumes, and the like) [7, p. 119].

Culture clusters, consist of about three illustrated culture capsules that develop related topics plus one 20 or 30 minutes simulation that integrates the information in the capsules and dramatizes it through a skit or situational role-play (Seelye). The development of the culture cluster might best be approached by selecting a central theme and working backwards to arrive at three or four components that might lend themselves to culture capsules. The videotaped sequence of greetings, invitations, and arrival at the host's house for dinner, for example, could be easily converted into a culture cluster by supplementing each segment of the tape with a culture-capsule narrative description of (1) greeting behavior, (2) extending invitations, (3) setting the table and (4) arriving at a host's home for dinner and appropriate guest etiquette. The videotape would serve as part of the multimedia presentation, and in the follow-up activity, students could simulate what they have observed and learned [7, p.86].

The culture assimilator was first envisioned as a programmed, out-of-class technique that would help individuals adjust to a new culture. A culture assimilator might consist of as many as 75 to 100 „critical incidents” or episodes that take place between a representative of home culture and a member of the target culture in which some type of conflict or misinterpretation develops. The source of conflict or puzzlement on the part of the representative of home culture is the lack of an appropriate cultural framework for understanding the incident.

Hadley describes three basic parts to each episode:

1. A critical incident occurs, illustrating some kind of miscommunication between a representative of home culture and a member of the target culture. This incident may be presented as a dialogue or in narrative form.

2. Students are then presented with four possible explanations of the source of the conflict in multiple - choice form.

3. As students make a choice of explanation, they are directed to a paragraph that provides them with feedback about whether or not their choice was correct. Feedback paragraphs may provide additional cultural information to further clarify the cultural point around which the critical incident has been designed. Distracters or

incorrect choices are designed to be attractive to students who have false stereotypic perceptions or ethnocentric interpretations of the situation [4, p.49].

Intercultural connections are very short situations – two or three sentences – that describe the cultural content of a target language country. Students work in pairs or in small groups: they discuss the situation, create and present conversations based on the situation.

A **culture minidrama** can be constructed from three to five episodes in which a cultural conflict or miscommunication occurs, as in the culture assimilator, above. As each episode is experienced, students attempt to explain what the source of the miscommunication is through class discussion, led by the teacher. After each episode, more cultural information is given, but not enough to identify the precise cause of the problem, which becomes apparent only in the last scene. Seelye explains that the function of this technique is to lead students to experience the vagueness of cross-cultural communication due to differing assumptions in the two cultures about the connotation of words or about everyday events and practices. Students see how they might easily jump to false conclusions about the people in the target culture because they are reacting on the basis of their own ethnocentric biases and perceptions [7, p. 196].

In the **deriving cultural connotations** activities students learn to associate culturally representative images with words and phrases they are learning in the new language. Techniques include the use of visual support materials as well as word-association activities. For example, in a word association activity students learn to examine their own connotations for words and see that they are not only idiosyncratic, but also culturally bound to some extent. The teacher gives a stimulus word related to a theme in the textbook and asks students to list as many associated words as possible. For the word house, for example, students might associate words like large, brick, windows, home, lawn, garage, and so forth.

Students can work individually to generate the lists and then be put into groups to rank-order the words according to their frequency on group members' lists.

The teacher can demonstrate how these images are culture-bound by obtaining similar data from speakers of the target language prior to this activity and presenting that data to students after they have reported their own results. Speakers of English from the U.S. might mention words like patio, basement, French windows, and pergola. Discussions about the similarities and differences in word-association chains will reveal how words cannot simply be translated from one language to the other, but must be situated in their own cultural context to be fully comprehended.

Artifact study is designed to help students discern the cultural significance of certain unfamiliar objects from the target culture. The activity involves giving descriptions and forming hypotheses about the unknown object. If possible, the teacher brings in the article in question, or obtains pictures of it. Once the article is displayed for all to see, students work in small groups and answer such questions as the following, suggested by Galloway:

1. What are the physical qualities of the object? Give as complete a description as possible.
2. How was it made, by hand or by machine?
3. What is its purpose?
4. Is it supposed to be decorative?
5. What role does it play in the culture? What is its social meaning, if any?
(Does it have associations with status, wealth, power, prestige?)
6. What facts can be determined about the culture from this object?
7. If this object were yours, what would you do with it? [3, p. 328].

Group discussions should take place in the target language whenever possible. After a suitable amount of time for discussion, the group's report their answers to the questions and compare responses. The teacher then gives a brief explanation of the artifact and its use in the society, and students examine how closely their own hypotheses conform to this explanation. Students determine to what extent their own cultural biases played a role in the formation of their hypotheses about the unknown object.

Activities of **decreasing stereotypic perceptions** type help students understand the dangers of making unwarranted generalizations about the people of another culture and help sensitize them to the variability within cultures that such generalizations can never capture. Stereotypes are most harmful if they create barriers to understanding and prevent the development of empathy. They are especially unfair if the behavior of one individual from the target culture is generalized to its entire people, a phenomenon that happens very often in tourist encounters. How many Europeans have returned from a tour of Paris to say that the city was beautiful, but „the people were nasty?“ How many people in Ukraine and Russia have the strong impression that all Americans speak very loudly? These and other stereotypic impressions can be subjected to scrutiny through well-designed classroom activities.

Galloway proposes that the foreign language classroom can provide an excellent forum for discussing and understanding cultural stereotypes. She maintains that a „facts“ approach, which has been commonly used in the study of culture, often emphasizes rote memorization rather than the development of greater sensitivity to cultural phenomena and understanding of deeper cultural values. She proposes a series of practical classroom activities that will sharpen students' awareness of their own cultural background, followed by activities that enable students to compare and contrast their native cultural context to that of the target country.

Using **proverbs in teaching cultural understanding** have been advocated by many language educators. Omaggio points out that in many cultures particularly in Africa, proverbs is a significant part of everyday cultural expression. In Africa, for example, proverbs are used in court disputes, political discourse, and education – literally in every facet of daily life. Because proverbs are so pervasive in these cultures, they can provide significant insights into the way of life of the people. „African proverbs carry culture – specific messages which must be understood if the language learner is to interact positively with members of the society“ [6, p. 214]. Omaggio points out that in some sub-Saharan cultures, mastery of proverbs is expected among conversational partners, and indeed needs to be considered in judging proficiency levels in these languages. „Here, the concept of proficiency is

tied not so much to the structure of the language, but to the appropriate use of the proverb in culturally-specific situations” [6, p. 215].

Merely collecting proverbs to present to students is not sufficient. According to Omaggio, proverbs need to be categorized so that the concepts contained in them can be related accurately to seemingly similar concepts in the students’ native language. „It is important to compare the target language proverbs to those found in the native language of the learner, not only to ascertain if similar values are extant across cultures, but also to avoid misinterpretation by the learner, who may see a false resemblance to one found in the native language” [6, p. 214].

Various language educators have advocated the use of **cartoons and other forms of humor** in language teaching. Many language educators included humor among the ten basic themes around which culture study should be based. But as Morain suggests, humor is one of the neglected areas in the foreign language curriculum, perhaps in part because a foreign culture’s humor is sometimes difficult to understand. „My students know that people in other cultures eat different foods, speak different languages, and get married, harried, and buried in different ways. But one of the hardest things for them to grasp is that people in other cultures laugh in the special ways their cultures have taught them to laugh” [5, p. 397].

Morain describes a study in which the reactions of American and international students were sought to American cartoons appearing in *The New Yorker* in 1990. A content analysis of all the cartoons published that year was done first to identify the kinds of scripts they contained. Morain explains that it is the juxtaposition of two different scripts or frames (types of schemata) that creates the humor, usually by overlapping opposite or incongruous situations [5, p. 398]. She discovered that there were five general areas of culture with which one must be familiar in order to understand the cartoons that were analyzed: (1) *the social world* (including domestic interactions, popular cultural situations and scenes, social expectations associated with stereotypic character types, and the entertainment world); (2) *the working world* (business, government, the professions, as well as miscellaneous jobs of all kinds); (3) *the language world* (including puns, word plays, slang, folk sayings, body

language); (4) *the intellectual world* (history, art, music, science, philosophy, religion, etc.); and (5) *any other world* (including visual gags and fantasy).

Morain selected 12 cartoons and assembled them into packets that were presented to both American and international students. Findings indicated that American and international students differed in what they found to be humorous in the cartoons. The two groups agreed more on the cartoons that they thought were not funny than on those they found humorous. In addition, international students tended to mark a cartoon funny, even when they didn't understand it. Perhaps the most important findings of this study were that knowledge of the cultural referents in the scripts of the cartoons was essential for understanding and appreciating the humor.

Morain discovered that the international students found humor to be hard to understand, and most said they experienced a sense of isolation and even alienation from the target culture group when humor passed by them [5, p. 407]. She makes several suggestions for incorporating the study of humor into the foreign language curriculum. Teachers should try to (1) provide students with authentic examples of cartoons, jokes, puns, and other forms of humor across all levels of the curriculum; (2) enrich the cultural component of the curriculum by including childhood experiences, which can supply missing cultural referents; (3) teach students about the conventions of humor in the target culture; (4) help students explore the scripts / frames of cartoons and jokes so that they are better equipped to analyze humor; and (5) give students opportunities to share humor from the target culture with one another [5, pp.407 – 408]. Giving students a chance to experience the humor of the target culture will be a motivating factor in their study of language.

Many language educators support the inclusion of a cultural component in the teaching of English. We mentioned the reasons for the current interest in the role of culture in language teaching. They are the following. Language educators and teachers realize that language and culture are intertwined. Educators realize that the mere learning of linguistic system is no guarantee of successful cross-cultural communication. And, teachers and students have come to recognize the importance of valuing other cultures in the world beyond their own. Incorporating culture into

language teaching can contribute significantly to developing students' practical English skills, building their awareness, and facilitating cross-cultural communication. Though a long time researched issue, culture is still a weak component in most curricula. We have suggested ways of how cultural goals can be infused into a proficiency oriented curriculum. The objective of this article is offer ideas on how to infuse cultural goals into proficiency oriented curriculum. Ten teaching techniques that we believe will promote understanding of culturally conditioned behavior are described in the article. They are the following: a culture capsule, culture clusters, the culture assimilator, intercultural connections, a culture minidrama, the deriving cultural connotations activities, artifact study, activities of decreasing stereotypic perceptions, using proverbs in teaching cultural understanding, and the use of cartoons and other forms of humor in language teaching. The suggested eleven techniques truly integrate culture with language study and are interesting and enjoyable for students. They teach culture together with speaking, listening and reading, thus representing the connections between language and culture.

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Understanding Culturally Conditioned Behavior: Some Common Teaching Techniques

Many language educators support the inclusion of a cultural component in the teaching of English. We mentioned the reasons for the current interest in the role of culture in language teaching. They are the following. Language educators and teachers realize that language and culture are intertwined. Educators realize that the mere learning of linguistic system is no guarantee of successful cross-cultural communication. And, teachers and students have come to recognize the importance of valuing other cultures in the world beyond their own. Incorporating culture into language teaching can contribute significantly to developing students' practical English skills, building their awareness, and facilitating cross-cultural communication. Though a long time researched issue, culture is still a weak component in most curricula. We have suggested ways of how cultural goals can be infused into a proficiency oriented curriculum. The objective of this article is offer ideas on how to infuse cultural goals into proficiency oriented curriculum. Ten teaching techniques that we believe will promote understanding of culturally conditioned behavior are described in the article. They are the following: a culture capsule, culture clusters, the culture assimilator, intercultural connections, a culture minidrama, the deriving cultural connotations activities, artifact study, activities of decreasing stereotypic perceptions, using proverbs in teaching cultural understanding, and the use of cartoons and other forms of humor in language teaching. The suggested eleven techniques truly integrate culture with language study and are interesting and enjoyable for students. They teach culture together with speaking, listening and reading, thus representing the connections between language and culture.

Key words: teaching techniques, cross-cultural communication, cultural component, specialists training

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