

Agon Approach in Foreign Language Learning and Cultural Values Assimilation in Technical College

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Abstract

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The paper deals with the problems of the language education in a higher technical school and investigates the effective ways of foreign language and the world culture values learning in the aspect of technical education humanization on agon. The universal values concept, the relationship of national and universal; education humanization theoretical principles; psychological and pedagogical basis for using games in higher school education; the theory and methodology of foreign languages teaching in polysensor environment; humanistic pedagogical competitiveness concept comprised theoretic-methodological basis of the work. Competition in foreign language learning contributes to the principle methodological objectives: students' psychological willingness to communication; a need for language frequent repetition; constant training in the correct speech choice; cultural knowledge efficient assimilation. Foreign language learning on the agon principle in this case suggests the involvement of an extra cultural unit with humanistic orientation containing materials based on universal values. Learning on the agon principle is a combination of active game forms with class traditional ones. The result of the active game interaction lies not only in the foreign language and cultural values assimilation efficiency, but also in other cultures positive perception motivation.

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Keywords: An extra cultural unit, agon principle, lingua socio cultural approach, game situation, artistic component, competition, foreign language learning, use, world culture values, humanistic orientation.

1. Introduction

Foreign language learning in its specificity is focused on the awareness of common problems of the world, the need for unity, collaboration and mutual understanding. It is aimed at broad socialization of the individual, social and cultural enrichment of experience, knowledge, norms, values, traditions, etc.



The history of mankind knows no national traditions that would develop without foreign ones. National includes cultural and social features of other people accepted and developed as a result of close cooperation. A truly humane in some sense or other useful ideas from other cultures can and should be integrated into the national culture, taking into account the priority of traditional national values (Vereshchagin E., Kostomarov, 1976). The better a person is familiar with the spiritual heritage of other people, the easier for him to understand another culture and to assimilate the language - the mirror, reflecting the past and the present of this culture.

2. Problem statement

One of the main objectives of language education in higher school is to educate a personality being able to use a foreign language as a communication means of the cultures and civilizations dialogue in the world, as well as the means of the world culture development. Linguists are of the opinion that the language learning without knowledge of the socio-cultural aspect is becoming foreign language vocabulary and grammar cramming (Lingua country study aspect in foreign languages teaching, 1997). Learning a foreign language as a means of international communication is closely linked with its active use as a tool of world culture knowledge, national cultures and socio cultures of the languages being studied (Safonova, 1993). It is necessary to take into account the statement that the linguistic socio-cultural approach dominance in teaching methods of English is gradually beginning to acquire a sound axiomatic meaning (Ter-Minasova, 2000). A cultural component introduced in the process of foreign language learning, which reflects national identity in the country culture of the language being studied is interpreted through the introduction the cultural monuments on the global level (Gnilova, 2001). The foreign language learning in this case is considered from the standpoint of the universal values primacy, humanism, recognizing the great contribution of different peoples to the world civilization (Bogomolova, 2002). Consequently, one of the main objectives of language education in higher technical school is to prepare the future professional, who possesses not only a certain volume of knowledge, being able to read, translate and communicate in a foreign language, but also sees the problems of the world community, understands them and has a view on these issues, which meets the requirements of modern society.

3. Research questions

The study is aimed at the students' language skills and habits improvement and the world cultures values adoption in the aspect of technical education humanization on agon activities basis in foreign language learning. The scientific concept of universal values, the relationship of national, international and universal (I.V. Bestuzhev-Lada, G.N. Volkov, B.S. Gershunsky); scientific-theoretical principles and technical education humanization provisions (G.V. Muhametzyanova, N.D. Nikandrov); psychological and pedagogical basis for the use of learning games in higher school educational process (Y.N. Kulyutkin, P.I. Pidkasistyĭ); research on the theory and methodology of foreign languages teaching in polysensor environment (G.A. Kitaygorodskaya, E.I.Passov); cultural studies approaches

to learning a foreign language (V.G. Kostomarov, V.V. Safonova, S.G. Ter-Minasova); modern concept of humanistic pedagogy of competitive identity (V.I. Andreev, M.N. Skatkin, V.A. Slastenin) comprise theoretical and methodological basis of the work. The linguistic socio-cultural approach in teaching methods of English has a sound domination nowadays. The essence of this approach is the developments of the domestic cultural linguistics - the science dealing with the specifics of the world language picture and the relationship of language and culture. As a consequence, it is possible to know the language, but to assimilate it without knowing the people's mentality is not possible (Safonova V. 1996). Besides the need for exploration of the mentality of the people, we must acknowledge some changes in language versions. In particular, if we previously studied mostly literary British English at school, now there is a gradual shift in favor of American English, which is the tribute to the "americanization" of the world. This shift is not only towards the English language study, but also to the Anglo-American culture familiarity (Furmanova, 1994). The importance of the linguistic socio-cultural approach for foreign language education lies in practical orientation of training, using lexical and grammatical forms in a real situation.

4. Purpose of the study

Taking into consideration all mentioned above and the challenges of foreign language teaching in technical colleges (English is non-core subject, limited time for classes, unequal occupancy groups, different initial language skills levels of school-leavers), the needs and interests of students, we put the idea that the competition game activity is an effective means by which the cognitive abilities and creativity of students are greatly increasing in the process of language and cultural values co-learning. As a result the aim of our work was defined as follows: language skills improvement and the world culture values assimilation effectiveness in the aspect of technical education humanization in foreign language training on the competition (agon) principle. The agon principle in pedagogic is considered mainly as part of the educational process on the basis of the traditional game activities. Struggle, competition, event are the words of one row, releasing rivalry, competitiveness as a motivating part of human activity. Charles Darwin and Thomas Hobbes believed that competition is at the heart of human nature. J. Huizinga developed in modern culture science idea of competitive gaming and cultural elements that define the specifics of the relationship of the man to society, nature and himself (Huizinga, 1991). The agon principle (from the Greek agona - competition) is a social formula peaceful adversarial entities in the limits of humanistic norms and values assuming equal status of parties. In modern humanistic pedagogy we have a generalized representation of the competitive person, who is characterized by the willingness and ability to high quality and efficiency of his operations, as well as to leadership in terms of competition, rivalry and tense fight with his competitors (V.I. Andreev, I.Y. Lerner, M. N. Skatkin). In this case, the adversarial principle establishes the importance of manifestations of personal qualities in competitive situations that are created in the educational activity. Thus, the adversarial principle provides the self-improvement start-up mechanism of the individual. Using the competition as an integral part of game forms of teaching a foreign language contributes to the important methodological problems, such as: the creation of psychological

readiness of students to communication; providing a need for frequent repetition of language material; training students in choosing the right version of the speech; the accumulation and assimilation of cultural knowledge. Thanks to the class competition game activities, students get to know the characters of literary works, the biographies and achievements of prominent figures in science, literature, deepening the idea of the individual historical periods of the country the language of which we study, arousing the acute social and political issues of our time thereby adopting the world culture values and mastering linguistic skills at their ease simultaneously.

4. Research methods

In the submitted research, the authors proceeded from the concept of communicative learning technology developed by a team of researchers led by E.I. Passov. It is based on 10 teaching principles: foreign language culture assimilation through communication, regularity, training on the basis of the situations individualization, originality, collective mutual activity etc (Passov E., Tsarkova V., 1992). To conduct the experimental work and reach the goal of the research, active game teaching methods on the agon principle have been developed and used to encourage creative and cognitive activity of students on the basis of methodological systems of intensive training: the emotional-semantic method (I.Y. Schechter); suggestopedical synthesis and consciously comparative methods (L.S. Gegechkori), the method of the individual and collective capacities activation (P.A. Kitaygorodskaya, 1992). All the methods have one thing in common - the principle of activation methods: collective interaction, the educational process organization role, the concentration principle in the teaching material and organization of educational process. The purpose of our experiment which lasted for a year was to check on and reveal the effectiveness of active game learning methodology on the agon principle on the designed program "Language and cultures polylogue" including an extra cultural unit with a humanistic orientation in linguistic socio-cultural approach to the foreign language learning. During the study in experimental and control groups of the 1st year students of Naberezhnye Chelny (Linguistic Centre) institute and Elabuga institute (NChI. LC and EPI) a systematic pedagogical supervision of students in classroom activities, testing and questioning were being conducted. At this stage, the aim of the study was to determine the initial level of language skills knowledge and world culture competence with the textbook by V. Kabakchi "World culture. Quiz " (Kabakchi, 2004), the test «20 prominent figures», computer testing. Interviews and observations as diagnostic means led to the conclusion that in most cases the students are able to perform basic reproductive tasks and to remember the information from texts and the teacher in a sufficiently large volume. However there is an inability to acquire this information, to select the desired form and content. The main reason for this situation, in our opinion, is the lack of students' training labor basic skills, the inability to relate to their educational activities consciously (e g, the lack of understanding train speech activity and master one or another skill in a particular situation, to control their attention during the session). Elabuga Institute students learnt English under the current training program, developed by the university teaching staff according to the education curriculum, the students of the NChI. LC began studying the language according the designed program "Language and cultures polylogue". The subjects and program content of the

program generally conformed to the training program which the students were trained in Elabuga but the content of additional materials, methods and forms of learning were different.

Table 1. The level of language skills and cultural erudition (in%).

Stages	Students			
	EPIL/S (27st)	NCh.LC L/S (26st)	EPIC/E (27st)	NCh.LC C/E (26st)
Beginning of the experiment	28	36	34	40
End of the experiment	43	66	56	78

The secondary diagnostics at the end of the academic year showed that the NChI students trained on the program "Language and cultures polylogue " with extra cultural unit, based on the agon active game forms of training activities gained a higher level of language skills and cultural knowledge and erudition, revealed more interest for creativity and commitment to participate in all forms of communication in the process of learning a foreign language.

6. Findings

The game is a struggle for something or showing something. Both of these functions may be united so that the game "shows" fight for something or turns into a contest to see who is able to show something better than others. The sense of equality, passion atmosphere enables the students to overcome shyness, which favorably affects the result: the language material is assimilated in a natural way and with the feeling of satisfaction - "I can speak to everyone on equal terms." The game involves a decision - what to do, what to say, how to win? The wish to solve these problems sharpens the mental activity. And the game opens up rich learning opportunities while the students are talking in a foreign language. Being entertainment, recreation, the game can turn into a learning process, in creativity, in a model of human relations. Learning a foreign language based on linguistic socio-cultural approach on the agon principle assumes the introduction and use of the program "Language and cultures polylogue " containing material about the outstanding humanist scholars and the world's scientific achievements, the traditions of different countries including also a musical and artistic component reflecting the linguistic features when compared to the native language and based on universal spiritual values. The inclusion of such materials into the education program creates additional opportunities to enhance the learning process to maintain the motivation to learn a foreign language, to expand the students' outlook to develop their potential creativity. The selection of primary equivalents - such as idioms, proverbs, sayings, which are special linguistic formulas - signs to indicate real life situations that incorporate folk wisdom, promotes to developing "general" and "private" analytical abilities in foreign languages teaching . Their function in the language enrichment in the creative thinking and speech development is very important in the youth education. In this case the foreign language learning of cultural and idiomatic paremiology materials are organized with the support and under the priority of folk wisdom national samples. Proverbs enclose not only popular "model of education", but also the result of upbringing - "a pattern of behavior" (Komarov, 2008). The folk wisdom comparison, in spite of the difference in peoples' mentality, allows you to make the teaching of a foreign language one of the

elements of speech and cultural enrichment. «Honesty is the best policy»; «Live and let live» don't exist in Russian as there are no analogues in English such as "Die but save your comrade" or "I is the last letter in the alphabet". The works of classics and modern poetry also enrich the spiritual world of the individual, providing the real introduction to the culture world because of its artistic value and methodological excellence. This form of activity promotes the formation of students' imagery, socio-cultural assimilation of information and provides the ability to carry out lexical and grammatical structures training in a natural way. It should be noted that, learning rhymes, tongue twisters, limericks students notice the rhythm of poetic forms and stimulate the poetic creativity development activities from word games (rhyme creativity) - one of the fascinating tasks for students to the development of poetry expressed in their own poems and songs. The music in language learning process creates a tradition dated to the origins of civilization, combines fully perfect melody and didactic poetry. This statement can be illustrated by the use of popular eternal hits (Imagine, I just called, Words, Show must go on) endowed by the great universal value. Emotions support attention, develop thought process productivity through the inner energy resources mobilization. The songs about love, friendship and a set of lexical and grammatical exercises to them, add the desired dynamics in learning. Giving priority to the musical and rhythmic elements in a foreign language learning, Steiner emphasized that this method of training is the most effective, creative and spiritual, because it "is being done in accordance with the laws of human nature" (Shteiner R., 1997). A song is one of the real ways to overcome linguistic and psychological barrier. Increased responsiveness, sensitivity, suggestibility and mental suppleness in reactions useful to organize a musical impulse characterize the song, not as an optional component of pedagogical influence, but as its key channel (Karpichenkova E., 1990) It appears that the desire for singing is directly related to the craving for beauty, for harmony, which is especially characteristic of youth. Students try to live according to the laws of beauty, that is, aesthetic, and hence the culture in the spiritual sense of the word, getting extra stimulus to language learning and expanding their socio-cultural competence. Many experts with high qualifications recognize that in the youth they studied English thanks to the songs of the Beatles, E. Presley, B. Dylan. Hence we should not underestimate the importance of the song for foreign language learning. Our research shows that the students learn the language and cultural material more effectively at the game situations lessons focused on the achievement of specific objectives. The phrase "the most complete and useful for myself" means that students think about what they learn, can apply it in real life situations and they can continue to learn independently. Training is much more effective application of the teacher time and resources of society, rather than training, which leaves students being passive, which is tiring for the teacher because of its monotony because it is not used in practice (Kazakova E., 1999). Classes with games is a combination of innovative forms in conjunction with the traditional ones (contests, quizzes, brainstorming, blitz tournaments, musical quizzes like popular TV shows) with questions and doubts, insights and discoveries, with the joy of knowing and dissatisfaction with a knowledge lack. At every lesson there is an intrigue: mobile simulation games «Imitate the proverb», «Rebound the ball and say the word»; linguistic game situations "Hangman", "Noughts and crosses", «Find the rhyming partner»; creative games burime, charady; educational games, similar to the popular TV shows ("What, Where, When", "Wheel of Fortune", "Lucky Strike", "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire"). The result of a game

interaction in the class is not only the efficiency of foreign language mastering, cultural knowledge assimilation, willingness of students to participate in all forms of communication, but also the development of the ability to various identifications, and, as a consequence, motivation on other cultures perception contributing to the cultures dialogue and values enrichment (Sidenko A., 2000). The students obtain the abilities for partnership and the need for it, the desire for the most productive and effective relationships. Thereby, the level of anxiety, isolation - the factors affecting the mental health of both the individual and the society as a whole is greatly decreasing (Karpenko, 1981). Excitement and emotional state are extremely increasing the interest and, therefore, the activity and effectiveness of linguistic material assimilation are stimulating socio-cultural information memory processes (including voluntary and involuntary).

7. Conclusions

The empirical methods results (observations, interviews, questionnaires, competitions and conferences, creative works, self-esteem) and the final diagnostics analysis led to the conclusion that learning foreign language on the agon principle promotes: 1. Students' constant interest and emotional forms of involvement in learning, readiness to participate in all forms of communication; 2. Language skills improvement, culture concepts deepening; 3. the pursuit of mutual exchange and cultural values enrichment and assimilation; 4 the need for partnership and effective relationships in a group. Undoubtedly, the use of music and artistic components, the selection of appropriate forms presenting the study materials on the agon principle have favorable effect on the process of students' educational activity, so the teacher should not neglect so-called aesthetic training without any damage to the training program but reasonably combining with it.

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