EdCW 2020
International Scientific and Practical Conference Education in a Changing World: Global Challenges and National Priorities

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' CULTURAL IDENTITY THROUGH STUDYING FICTIION IN LINGUISTIC EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

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Abstract

This research paper addresses the issues of developing students' cultural identity in the process of reading and analyzing fiction in the framework of the discipline "Practice of Intercultural Communication", which is taught to the students of the bachelor degree educational program "Linguistics". The experimental teaching aimed at developing students' intercultural sensitivity and cultural identity and implies the analysis of two short stories ("The Dream" by W.S. Maugham and "A Daughter of Albion" by A. P. Chekhov), which manifest the perception of the other culture. The research proved that fiction can influence the outcome of representing the other culture and even affect molding or boosting stereotypes. The way how the other culture is represented in fiction depends on the writer's attitude to it and the expectations of the target readers. Besides, comparing pieces of literature that contain culturally marked information fosters the students' capability to relativize themselves and value the attitudes and beliefs of others, and considerably adds to the construct of their cultural identity. The offered algorithm of analyzing pieces of literature centers on critical reading and can be transferred to analyzing culturally-marked films and songs. Moreover, the results of research can be implemented in training future philology teachers, too.

Keywords: Cultural identity, fiction, intercultural competence

1. Introduction

The modern world is exposed to a lot of different problems and challenges: pandemics, ecological and economic problems, terrorism, extremism, etc. These challenges demand world action, but the countries of the world are not always eager to unite their efforts in collaborating to solve them. Working internationally requires understanding the problem and the capability to hear different approaches to it on the part of the international team members (Batarchuk, 2019). This capability is only possible when the level of intercultural sensitivity of everybody involved is high enough for that. According to the Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity by M. Bennett this capability reaches its adequate level when the person at least accepts the cultural differences, but what is more to that – they not only represent their own culture and develop their native cultural identity, but they also integrate into the other culture they are to communicate with (Mikheeva, 2018). In case of the international team, to collaborate effectively they are to produce the "third culture", which generates the common rules and modes of behavior for all team members (Kramsch, 2009). In our opinion, the idea of the "third culture" does not blur cultural differences, but instead, it focuses on the strengths of each culture and teaches to take advantages of them.

So, in order to accept and understand other cultures, one should realize their own cultural identity: be aware of their own cultural characteristics and be able to foresee the possible cultural clashes in perceiving the events of real life. That is why we consider as a crucial issue to get the students of any educational level and any educational program, both in secondary schools and higher educational institutions, to realize how cultures differ from one other, and what their cultural identity is. In this respect different methods and technologies can be applied. One of them is reading and analyzing fiction that enables to characterize the epoch, lifestyles, ethical norms of the cultures described, and to demonstrate the perception of the other cultures' representatives. Such an analysis is especially valuable in language learning as language and cultural identity are closely interrelated.

2. Problem Statement

The issue of identity has always been focused on by sociologists and is thoroughly investigated. Identity is generally defined as a person's own sense of self; of who they are. It is a person's frame of reference by which they perceive themselves. Identities are constructed by an integral connection of language, social structures, gender orientation and cultural patterns. There is a complex relationship between culture and identity.

Considering different types of identity researchers claim that identities are constructed through social interaction and are posited as a relational phenomenon. Thus, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) propose that the identity relations are not only revolving around the axis of sameness and difference, these relations are constructed "through several, often overlapping, complementary relations, including similarities/differences, genuineness/artifice, and authority/delegitimacy" and other dimensions, the list of which is not exhausted (p. 598). Such a multiple relationality approach enables other researchers to make a special accent on the interrelations between language and identity. Thus, Sarah (2018) focuses on the

interdependence of identity, language, and ideology, underlying the idea that future research on identity and language should aim at connecting language ideologies and identity.

Realizing close links between identity and language, one cannot but emphasize that constructing one's identity is influenced by educating a person (Maftoon et al., 2012). It refers to different identity types, but it mostly concerns one's cultural identity as a phenomenon that refers to cultural groups and communities. Due to globalization cultural identity is much discussed nowadays. It is generally defined as a sense of belonging to a cultural group behaviorally, communicatively, psychologically and sociologically. It includes values, meanings, customs and beliefs and reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which give us as one entity a stable, unchanging, continuing frame of reference and meaning.

There are different approaches to cultural identity nowadays (Petkova, 2005). On the one hand, the concept of cultural identity is considered more acute today as people tend to resist global trends of universalism, try to retain their cultural bonds, and retain their cultural heritage (Millrood, 2016). Meanwhile, cultural identity is alleged as a disappearing phenomenon because cultural differences and distinctions are getting blotted out more and more under the impact of globalization. We share B. Norton's opinion who regards identity as a socio-cultural construct which is dynamic and constantly changing across time and place, but remaining its considerable importance (Norton, 2006).

Cultural identity as an individual characteristic is molded in two stages. The first stage takes place in childhood and is known as the primary stage of enculturation. The cultural information at this period is transmitted to the person vertically, mainly by their parents, who read folk tales, play traditional games, and accompany all activities with folk proverbs, sayings, and riddles. The secondary stage of enculturation occurs in a more mature age, when the person is able to compare cultures and to better recognize their own cultural distinctions analyzing different modes of behavior and lifestyles. The culture-focused information on this stage is transmitted to the person by different sources of information: horizontally – by their peers in intercultural contacts, or, indirectly – from more experienced individuals or in specialized institutions (schools, universities) and through mass media.

It is seen significant to realize that universities can play a serious role in developing a person's cultural identity, and fiction can contribute a lot in this respect as literature is dialogical by nature and, as the researchers claim, it generates "a culture dialogue (historical, artistic, aesthetic, civil, national and international)" (Kolobova et al., 2018, p. 1276). Scott and Huntington emphasize the idea that the text is a vehicle via which the student acquires the second culture (Scott & Huntington, 2002). Rezaei and Naghibian (2018) propose that literary texts foster developing students' intercultural competence and reveal not only cultural differences but also how different cultures may share some values and beliefs. Experimental teaching in Colombian University proved that the students who read English short stories simultaneously developed communicative competence and intercultural knowledge. Reading and analyzing English literature stimulated discussions in which students shared their opinions, life experiences, and culture references enhancing their intercultural competence (Gómez & Luis, 2012).

The aspect of comparative analysis of fiction was investigated by Kazan University researchers who claim that comparison of literatures, based on the situation of the cultural plurality, "is promising

from the point of view of realizing the task of forming the national identity of students" (Ibragimov et al., 2017, p. 298).

3. Research Questions

Realizing the beneficial role of fiction in developing cultural identity we expect the research to answer the following question:

- Which teaching methods can be efficacious in affecting one's cultural identity through reading and analyzing fiction in the classes of such disciplines as "Practical Course of the English Language" or "Practice of Intercultural Communication", which are taught to the students of educational programme "Linguistics"?

- In which respect the construct of the students' cultural identity are affected by the fiction analysis?

- Do reading and analyzing pieces of native and target culture fiction develop students' intercultural sensitivity?

4. Purpose of the Study

The investigation of the fiction analysis impact on the students' cultural identity determines setting up and achieving the purpose to reveal this impact while organizing and conducting experimental teaching aimed at developing the capability to relativize oneself and value the attitudes and beliefs of others analyzing and contrasting short stories representing the target and native cultures.

5. Research Methods

- In order to achieve the purpose of study we applied the method of experimental teaching. Having formulated the hypothesis that the comparative analysis of short stories representing the target and native cultures will contribute to the construct of the students' cultural identity and will boost the development of their intercultural sensitivity, we selected teaching material and modeled the lessons scenarios that were conducted in terms of experimental teaching and accompanied by the questionnaires as a form of refection. The lessons scenarios are based on the communicative and the intercultural teaching approaches.

- In order to monitor and if necessary to correct the process of teaching the method of targeted pedagogical observance was applied. Within this method the students' comments and opinions were registered and analyzed for making conclusions about the changes in the cognitive component of their intercultural sensitivity.

- In addition to pedagogical research methods we applied the method of stylistic analysis of literature material that was used in teaching. The stylistic analysis of language means enables

students to interpret the characters' feelings correctly. The correct interpretation of the authours' intentions is the ground for the adequate comprehension of meaning in literature works.

6. Findings

The experimental teaching was organized in the framework of the discipline "Practice of Intercultural Communication", which is incorporated into the bachelor degree educational programme "Linguistics: Theory and Practice of Intercultural Communication". The discipline's language of instruction is English. The experimental teaching was organized in a homogeneous group of 24 Russian students, who were offered the task to read the story by W.S. Maugham "The Dream". The story describes the conversation between the narrator and a Russian who sat at the same table in the Vladivostok railway station restaurant. The students were first expected to analyze the communicants' behavior in the intercultural context: how strangers in different cultures are supposed to communicate with each other when they happen to encounter in such situations like in the story; which topics are commonplace for a small talk in Great Britain and which topical taboos are broken by the Russian in the story in terms of intercultural context of the situation.

The content of this W.S. Maugham's story is much more to that than simply the analysis of the strangers' communication. Having made conclusions on these issues the students and the teacher came over to the deeper analysis. The Russian opens up the story of his life and his wife's death. The Russian depicts his wife as a very jealous woman who was obsessed by her husband, which couldn't but burden him and even made him think that his life could have been easier without her. The wife felt it, too. Once the wife saw a dream that her husband had caught hold of her and attempted to throw her over the balusters. As the house was very tall it undoubtedly meant her death. The dream frightened the wife so much and the fear she felt was so strong that she kept seeing this dream. And once, as the Russian says, she fell down the same way as she had seen in her dream and died. The narrator is shocked by the story the Russian told him, the question whether the Russian killed his wife or whether the woman accidentally fell down or committed suicide remains open. "The Dream" finishes with the narrator's phrase: "… I have never been able to make up my mind whether he was serious or jesting".

As one can observe W.S. Maugham's stories are multi-layered. The same can be said about "The Dream". The author narrates the story which is almost a detective one and meanwhile he addresses the issues of Sigmund Freud's psychanalysis that, on the one hand, all dreams are forms of subconscious resolution of a conflict and, on the other hand, a criminal gets an adrenaline buzz confessing a crime to a person who is not able to accuse him.

Besides, the fact which demands attention is that the main character of the story is a foreigner (the word "foreign" has rather negative than positive connotation in the English language), namely a Russian: without a name, described like an ugly man in his appearance, educated but appalling in his manners. Having analyzed the content of the story and the essence of its message, the students were asked to hold a critical analysis of the story, which enables students to comprehend the culture-marked information more deeply (Setyaningsih, 2019). The students focused on the author's attitude to the Russian and being in the

role of readers too, they answered the question which impression the main character produced on them: positive, positive rather than negative, neutral, negative rather than positive, negative. All the students answered that the author's attitude to the Russian is negative: it is proved by the Russian's description and the narrator's comments on his own feelings. As for the impressions of the character, 17 students out of 24 alleged that the main character produced a negative impression on them, whereas 7 students claimed about negative rather than positive impression. Then the students were offered one more question for the discussion: What is the role of fiction in creating images of representatives of other cultures? They were offered to get acquainted with the researches on that point and express their own opinion in the essay. The most common opinion can be formulated the following way: fiction can influence the outcome of representing the other culture and even affect molding or boosting stereotypes.

The carried out analysis of W.S. Maugham's story brought it home to us to read and analyze a story by a Russian writer where one can observe the representation of the other culture, too. The choice was made towards the worldwide famous author who lived approximately at the same time with W.S. Maugham and was also renowned as a short stories writer – Anton Chekhov. His story "A Daughter of Albion" was written in 1883 and represents the scene of fishing in one of the Russian provincial estates. The district Marshal of Nobility, his family name is Otsov, pays a visit to a landowner whose family name is Gryabov and watches Gryabov and the British governess of his children fishing. Otsov tries to talk Gryabov out of the pursuit and suggests spending time having a drink together. However, the plot of the story develops around fishing and discussing the governess, who, as Gryabov says, does not know a word in Russian although she has spent for ten years in the country, and who seems arrogant and disdainful to her employer. Gryabov criticizes the Governess's appearance. He uses a lot of different disparaging epithets and does not feel ashamed to take off his clothes at her presence when he needs to pull fishing hook out of water.

Although the male characters of the story are not sparing in insulting words towards the governess, she does not generate the negative image and the personage arouses positive rather than negative feelings on the part of the reader, which was proved by the survey of the students. 14 students confirmed that their impression of the governess is more positive than negative and 10 students claim their neutral attitude to her after reading. The students also mentioned that they (14 people) sympathize with her and understand her behavior in the context of the story.

The students' opinions seem quite significant, because they managed to feel that the Chekhov's story poses the clash of cultures. But the opposed cultures are not shown as "mine" is positive – "theirs" is negative. They are presented as different, maybe alien, but not hostile, as Russian readers do not experience negative feelings to the either side.

To compare the representation of the other culture in both stories the students were offered to fill the table, in which they could fix the following categories of describing the main character: name, occupation, education, appearance, manners, perception of the character by other personages in the story, the author's attitude.

This comparative analysis of the main characters showed that in describing the governess by A. Chekhov neutral characteristics prevail (none in 7 categories was definitely negative as perceived by the

students being readers of the story), whereas in describing the Russian by W.S. Maugham one can notice a negative dominance in representing the main character (2 characteristics are neutral, 5 are negative).

The conclusion which was made by the students demonstrated quite a high level of their intercultural sensitivity. Despite rather categorical thoughts they shared in class, mostly all of them supported the idea that the way how the other culture is represented in fiction depends on the writer's attitude to it and the expectations of the target readers. They also mentioned the importance of reading fiction (prose and poetry) that shows how their culture is perceived by others. They shared a unanimous opinion that reading and analyzing culturally-marked fiction definitely adds to the construct of their cultural identity.

Thus, the applied experimental teaching includes the following stages:

- selecting literary works as teaching material that enables students to compare and contrast representing the native or other cultures. The selected material should correspond to the students' level of language acquisition and their level of intercultural competence;
- organizing classroom activities that include reading for detailed comprehension, analyzing cultural markers and the means of their verbal expression, evaluating the writer's attitude to the cultures in focus and the impression the characters produce on the readers;
- motivating students to read more pieces of literature that represent the native or other cultures.

As for the main teaching methods, the students were involved into comparative analysis and categorizing of linguistic means, modeling and presenting monologues in the voice of the short stories' characters that manifest their concealed feelings, pair and group discussions of dubious propositions.

7. Conclusion

In the course of the research we reached the set purpose and organized the experimental teaching on the point of affecting students' cultural identity by reading and analyzing fiction. This experimental teaching manifested that fiction which contains culturally marked information teaches students to relativize themselves and value attitudes and beliefs of others. It was proved by the opinions of the participants, who claim that for developing intercultural communicative competence they see crucial to be able to look at oneself with the eyes of the representatives of the other culture. The students share the idea expressed by Corbett (2010) that intercultural language education does not mean uncritical acceptance of the beliefs and values of others. Intercultural education calls for opening minds and inquiring when faced with the otherness. Literary texts as forms of cultural expression dramatize strangeness in the other culture and see this strangeness in perception of one's own culture by others. It stimulates discussion which makes students add distinctions to their cultural identity.

Answering the question which teaching methods can be efficacious in affecting one's cultural identity through reading and analyzing fiction, we can state that presented above teaching algorithm based on B. Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives enables students to acquire the material, analyze it, evaluate, and synthesize their own knowledge, which can gradually gain the personal meaning for students.

The main conclusion of the research states that fiction has a serious linguistic and didactic potential for developing students' cultural identity if the chosen reading material is culturally marked and enables students to compare and contrast their native culture and other cultures. Such reading material masters the students' foreign language communicative competence and develops their intercultural competence that underlies the capability to effectively communicate with the other cultures' representatives. Reading and analyzing culturally marked fiction develops critical awareness, teaches to discover cultural information, to relate and interpret the meaning, and what is more – to relativize oneself and value the attitudes and beliefs of others.

The research is to be continued: it is worth comparing the research data with the effect the analytical reading and comparative analyses of the same pieces of fiction can produce on the representatives of the Anglo-Saxon culture. Moreover, one can expect the closer effect of analyzing culturally-marked films and songs, which technologically can be organized in the form of the project. This way teaching technology will strengthen the content and critical thinking skills of the students and have a more profound effect on the students' cultural identity.

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