

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER AS A CULTURAL MEDIATOR

Introduction. It is widely accepted that culture is a crucial element in learning and teaching a foreign language. In teaching, it is not enough to develop students' linguistic competence to guarantee success in intercultural communication. Therefore, teaching a foreign language doesn't mean dealing with the theoretical aspects of a language but also promoting cultural literacy that will help learners to be aware of cultural similarities and differences. The society nowadays is experiencing a massive mobility of people from one country to another for work, study or travel. Due to this mobility, it is required to prepare students for the future, to face difficult challenges and overcome conflicts that occur as a result of culture differences.

According to the national educational standards, students must learn to accept and understand people of a different cultural background. For this reason, a foreign language teacher is seen as the mediator between two different cultures. Foreign language teachers bear the responsibility to help students to understand and raise their awareness of the target culture, a complex phenomenon that is not acquired easily. In the mobile, digital world more emphasis is given to revealing cultural specificity to predict and overcome barriers in intercultural communication. Therefore, the foreign language teacher performs as a cultural mediator in the classroom, and defining their functions is necessary to design lessons and teaching materials.

This paper is aimed at exploring the functions of the foreign language teacher as a cultural mediator.

Main part. The relationship between language and culture is of extreme complexity because "on the one hand, language is an integral part of culture, but, on the other hand, it is an expression of culture" [1, p. 27]. The role of a teacher is culturally defined, and language teaching needs cultural aspects to be taken into account as any language is culture bound. Therefore, teachers of a foreign language should be able to act as cultural mediators. They provide information about different sets of values, orientations, beliefs, assumptions and socio-cultural conventions by clarifying culture-specific expressions and concepts that might give rise to misunderstanding.

It is obvious that in order to fulfill the role of an intercultural mediator, a foreign language teacher should have intercultural competence as an integrative quality of personality. It is expressed in the readiness to actualize the manifestation of competence in various situations of solving social and professional tasks [2, p. 104]. The teacher should have specific skills, knowledge and abilities. Mediation between target and native cultures means interpreting and analyzing the cultural phenomena. It is done by reflecting and understanding their own and target cultures. The teacher should diligently influence students' attitudes; teach them to be tolerant, respectful, free from prejudice towards people from other cultures. To be a cultural mediator, the teacher should have deep knowledge of the target language.

The role of teachers in mediating cultures and teaching cultural literacy in the foreign language classroom consists of: (a) acting as a cultural mediator between different cultures, helping students overcome sociocultural barriers and cultural prejudices and destroy cultural stereotypes; (b) creating a comfortable cultural space for students so that they can fully interact and collaborate with people from different national, regional, religious, and social subcultures; (c) transferring the skills and abilities necessary for cultural interaction [3, p. 101].

To achieve that, the foreign language teacher performs the following functions:

1) cognitive, which is aimed at assimilation of the system of socio-cultural knowledge for further application in other activities and the formation of prerequisites for overcoming barriers that hinder the implementation of intercultural mediation;

2) educational, the essence of which is to spread the native culture of the intercultural mediator and the culture of the peoples of the target language;

3) communicative, the meaning of this function is manifested in interaction with representatives of the culture of the target language [4, p. 129].

For learning a foreign language and using it effectively in real life, a mediation of the native and foreign culture is an undeniable necessity. An ability to mediate two cultures will help teachers to bring students closer to the target language culture by specifying the difference between their native language and the foreign language that they wish to learn. In this way, successful mediation of the native language culture and the target language culture ensures meaningful intercultural communication.

Conclusion. To sum up, in order to fulfill the role of an intercultural mediator, a foreign language teacher should have intercultural competence and a certain set of skills and abilities: interpreting and analyzing the cultural phenomena, influence diligently on student attitudes, teach them to be tolerant, respectful, free from prejudice towards people from other cultures. Also, a foreign language teacher as a cultural mediator should perform the following functions: cognitive, educational and communicative.

References

1. *Larzén, E.* In pursuit of an intercultural dimension in EFL-teaching: Exploring cognitions among Finland-Swedish comprehensive school teachers / E. Larzén. — Akademi University Press, 2005. — 170 p.

2. *Пинюта, И. В.* Предпосылки межкультурного посредничества учителя иностранного языка / И. В. Пинюта // Профессионально ориентированный иностранный язык: от обучения к эффективной коммуникации : сб. науч. ст. / Акад. упр. при Президенте Респ. Беларусь ; редкол.: О. П. Дмитриева, Е. В. Макарова, Е. С. Сидельникова ; под ред. Е. В. Макаровой. — Минск : Акад. упр. при Президенте Респ. Беларусь, 2019. — С. 104—107.

3. Council of Europe. Common European framework of reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment companion volume with new descriptors. — Strasbourg, 2018. — 278 p.

4. *Пинюта, И. В.* О функциях межкультурного посредника / И. В. Пинюта // Актуальные вопросы повышения качества языкового образования на современном этапе : материалы Междунар. науч.-практ. конф., Минск, 21—22 дек. 2010 г. : в 2 ч. / редкол.: Н. П. Баранова [и др.]. — Минск : МГЛУ, 2011. — Ч. 2. — С. 129—132.