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Cross-Cultural Aspects in Teaching English

The article is devoted to the role of the dialogue among civilizations in forming socio-cultural consciousness among the students of non-philological faculties. At the turn of the centuries, taking into account the tendency of global integration, elements of multiculturalism should be introduced in the foreign language courses in higher educational establishments. Appreciation and respect of the cultural heritage of other civilizations help better prepare the youth of today for the challenges of tomorrow.

Статтю присвячено впливу діалогу цивілізацій на формування соціокультурної компетенції студентів нефілологічних спеціальностей. На межі тисячоліть, враховуючи тенденцію світової інтеграції, необхідно впроваджувати елементи мультикультуралізму, особливо в курсах вивчення іноземних мов у вищих навчальних закладах. Визнання та повага до культурної спадщини народів інших країн сприяє кращій підготовці сучасної молоді до змін та вимог майбутнього.

Have you ever asked yourself a question: “Can a person live alone?” Perhaps, not, as God created all the living beings in pairs. So, it is quite natural that everyone needs communication, someone to take care about and to rely on. We consider no one can live alone in the world. We should add, unity is much more important especially nowadays when all the civilized countries head for integration. Communication between people in any spheres of life could be fruitful for the further development of mankind. Consequently, **our research will be devoted to the investigation of the problem** of teaching English in cross-cultural context. This could help students not only understand the language better, but it will create a true picture of modern life traditions and mentality of the British compared to the Ukrainians or peoples of the other

countries. Such an experience could be useful not only for the philologists but for the students of non-philological faculties in the practical courses of studying English. This will also broaden their knowledge in country studying. As a result, students could comprehend the ideas of the original English texts better, could react appropriately to the suggested communicative situations and reproduce independently “life models” in oral speech: in dialogues and monologues.

In our time of rapid progress in all spheres of life humans still fail to control their mind and body, to live in harmony with themselves and with the surrounding world, Nature and environment. We appear to be unable to live without wars, fear and conflicts at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Young Ukrainians are more active, independent, politically involved and business-like today. Still the main problem for them is choice. As they no longer trust politicians or other authorities, young Ukrainians rely only on their own resources and abilities. The problem is how to overcome the crisis of moral values on their way to success and career.

The scientific innovation and practical value of our research is that we tried for the first time to combine and to put to use the progressive ideas of Dj. Krishnamurty about teaching and the principles, suggested by the western scholars. Taking this into account, the only way out for the youth is to combine Western Science and activity with Eastern philosophy and wisdom of passive observation. Those times have already passed when the East sacrificed itself for the benefit of the West. Actually the East influences the West today, the first even prevails in such spheres of life as: science, art and everyday life. Young people can't ignore the fact that they prefer eastern philosophy and ideas, technology, way of clothing, music and art. It seems, the East has already penetrated in all spheres of life of the West. But we dare say this is quite inevitable.

Do we know everything about our origin, our past? I am afraid we don't, not yet. Actually at the beginning of the XX-th century Alexander Blokh called us, Slavs, "the narrow-eyed Asians". What does it mean? It turns out, our blood is mixed, though we consider ourselves Europeans in our tastes, opinions, education and mentality, our Eastern roots are gradually emerging on the surface. No doubt, at present the Dialogue among civilization is conditioned by the growing influence of the East on the West and the latter is becoming deeply interested in mutually advantageous cooperation with its wise and experienced neighbour.

J. Krishnamurti, a famous Indian philosopher and guru, wrote in his work "Think of these things" that "a person must be alone to find truth, God, but we are not educated to live alone, so we need a companion" (4; 23). His idea coincides with the Latin proverb "Cognosce te ipsum" meaning one should reveal the mystery of existence through his individuality. The guru suggests feeling harmony with nature and a person's soul. What could be more unique than observing usual, common things, like a bird's song, or fallings of a leaf, or splashing of water? Unfortunately we fail to do this in our technological epoch, when everyone, being only a

tiny part of a great industrial and political world machine, is too preoccupied with his own personal worries: family and children, job and career, money and power. We are gradually losing individuality, moral values. We can't agree more with the philosopher's idea that any important transformations first take place on the level of a man's spirit but not on the level of political, social or ideological systems. In our opinion it's vital to believe in people, their strong will and character, but not in bare principles, as this is the only way for modern civilization to survive. At the turn of the centuries when "mankind is threatened with the ecological catastrophe, the third world war and the Judgement Day, we should get rid of all fears and unbearable sufferings through self-realization of a free creative personality" (7; 200). No wonder that Western philosophies and ideologies failed as they tried to change a man and the latter attempted to rebuild, reconstruct the environment which led to unpredictable consequences. J. Krishnamurti, as a representative of the Eastern culture, proposed that human-beings should co-exist in harmony with nature and satisfy their requirements in accordance with its laws. Only then such a personality will decorate and rebuild any system, not vice versa. We observe now that the development of science and technology without wisdom and "spiritual perfection has created a civilization of robots with ideal conditions for manipulating every sheep by totalitarian machine" (7; 205). An English writer Aldous Huxley following the guru's idea, suggests combining pacifism and moral self-perfection as the only way to avoid overall "brain-wash", intentional infiltration of consciousness and subconscious influence of mass media. As a result our brain is overloaded with useless information. We could be turned off from the vitally important things and can't tell, what is vice and what is virtue.

A. Huxley in his essay "The Writers and the leaders" analyzed the negative influence of a heavy flood of information on modern West World. As a result, peoples in the West don't cooperate in using treasury of the ancient literary and wisdom heritage. All they have left in common is science and information. But science (meaning technical progress) is knowledge, not wisdom; the first deals with quantitative, not qualitative characteristics of the world, though the latter influences us directly" (9; 223). What author means is: being engaged in technological progress, we should remember about human values and negative

consequences this progress might cause. The West got its knowledge from the ancient Eastern civilizations, like Indian and Chinese, but it failed to learn their wisdom. Dialogue between the East and the West could help future generations and our modern society live without fear and suffering, without wars and conflicts. If we find love in ourselves, as Indian guru believes, everyone will co-exist in harmony with the rest of the world. We are quite sure, if a person manages to preserve this innocent understanding of love through his life without putting out a begging bowl, no man or human agency will corrupt such an individual.

A Teachers role is primary in this case. An educator who is preoccupied with his own personal worries can do no good in bringing up and sharing knowledge with students. This indifference and egoism can even spoil young souls, breed a nation of robots, unable to bring out their own decisions and stand their ground. **We strongly advise** Western teachers and representatives of other humanitarian sciences, like: sociology, political science and psychology, – with perfect (high) professional training to put to use the experience of eastern gurus. You shouldn't force a student to learn, but like guru, try to lighten the youngsters' way in search for knowledge, create a warm, friendly atmosphere which inspires learning and reveals one's abilities and talents. We reckon everyone remembers the idea of Summerhill school built on Freud's and Deui's philosophic principles but let's make this dream come true, not leave it an abstract notion. The greatest achievement in teaching involving the Dialogue among civilizations has been the introduction of Cross-Cultural Studies in higher educational establishments. Studies in multiculturalism have been gaining more and more importance in recent years among the researchers and students.

Customs vary with cultures and not to experience a deep "culture shock" on students' arrival in a foreign country, like the USA or the UK, to continue their studies or on other purposes, the young people should learn the Western traditions and mentality beforehand. This could be done during their English course, comparing the English-speaking customs and lifestyle with Ukrainian. People living in varied cultures handle many small daily things differently. What a dull world that would be if it weren't true! But regrettably, most of us are quite unfamiliar and uninformed in regard to other lands. So, our aim, as teachers of English, is

to involve students in discussing and comparing different customs, at least Slavonic with the English-speaking ones. We should better develop in our youth the feeling of cosmopolitanism than extreme nationalism or ethnocentrism, while the rest of the world heads for integration. We are all being inevitably influenced simultaneously by the traditions of the West and the East without any hassels of geographical boundaries. The latter have been gradually becoming vaguer. Still, depending on the culture we should follow some of the rules of behavior in public, in business and even at parties. A.R. Lanier in her book "Living in the USA" stresses that "...our people, having come from so many nationalities, get a wider range of what is "acceptable" than in most of the countries, where the inhabitants have grown up with a common heritage" (3; 4). As a result no one needs to feel uncomfortable in following his or her own customs. Although Americans are used to hyphenating their nationality, even taking into consideration the "Melting Pot" theory of social change, most of them lack knowledge of the other lands. But it's worth saying that each person can do his or her own thing and be respected in the USA to a large extent.

Perhaps, we should strongly recommend our students reading the two world-famous books by V.Ovchinnikov: "The Roots of Oak" – about the English and "A Branch of Sakura" – about the Japanese. With a great talent of a journalist the author describes these people. Students could get to know more about the conservative but rather friendly and polite Englishmen, who love their pets and are too strict with their children. V. Ovchinnikov also provides a number of proverbs and sayings for detailed cross-cultural studying. The writer can't help adding that to know a foreign language to perfection means to understand the country's humour, which is especially true of the English, whose jokes are rather ironic and therefore offensive for strangers.

It appears, the reason "culture shock" occurs is that we aren't prepared for the ethnographic differences and because of the way we are taught of culture, we are ethnocentric. According to J.Friedl, "ethnocentrism is a belief that one's own patterns of behavior are the best, the most natural, beautiful, right and important" (2; 197). Our students should be aware that such point of view is incompetent, even dangerous, considering the consequences it can lead to. Therefore other people, to the extent that they live differently, live by standards that are

inhumane, irrational, unnatural or wrong. It seems to be a kind of racist ideas, rather hostile and aggressive. “Ethnocentrism is a view that one’s own culture is better than all others; it is the way all people feel about themselves as compared to outsiders. There’s no one in our society who isn’t ethnocentric to some degree, no matter how liberal or open-minded he or she might claim to be” (2; 197). Anthropologists who study other cultures think, that it’s something you should constantly be aware of, so that when we are tempted to make value judgements about another way of life, we can look at the situation more objectively, taking our bias into account.

So, we, teachers, should try our best to introduce the students to the varied and valuable heritage of not only English or American culture in many aspects of it, like: myths, folktales, proverbs and language, but to the peculiarities of non-Western civilizations as well. Our idea is not to make someone repulsive or ignorant about the other countries. We should keep in mind the saying: “Tastes differ” and respect foreign people and their cultures granting them the status of human-beings, but not call them “barbarians” as we used to do.

As a result of our investigation, **we could draw the following conclusions:**

- We’d insist on the importance of the Dialogue between the cultures for the students learning foreign languages, speech.
- Combining philosophic ideas of Dj. Krishnamurti with A. Huxely’s and B. Russell’s could promote the introduction of the most up-to-date ways in teaching foreign languages through “the Dialogue among civilizations”.

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especially if it happens not through Internet or other multi-media communications but as a “live contact”. In this case student’s attitude towards many things could become more personal, could help understand the mentality of others, the emotional and intellectual processes which take place on the level of consciousness. -Sharing science and information is too formal. Computers and other technique which satisfies our growing requirements for information can’t teach us self-analysis to perceive surrounding people through ourselves. We are convinced, in order to make the Dialogue fruitful the participants should find some spiritual, moral values in common.

- Civilizations ought to find out the optimal way of combining western science and technologies with eastern knowledge of philosophy and wisdom for the further spiritual integration of the nations. Our strong belief is we should reunite to overcome nowadays’ disintegration process. When we are together, we form something larger.
- Studying cross-cultural aspects through original English texts, audio and video materials in country-studying will help create a true picture of the British lifestyle, customs, traditions and language peculiarities. Students will be more involved in teaching process through “live contact” experience in monological and dialogical

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