

USING VISUAL REPRESENTATION TO DEVELOP INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE WHILE TEACHING ENGLISH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

In today's globalized world the university graduates in addition to strong academic skills are required to possess intercultural competence. Although intercultural competence has been defined in various theoretical models by intercultural scholars, there is an active search for the ways to implement educational activities designed to develop intercultural competence into the course of foreign language teaching at the level of higher professional education. To address this challenge, the authors analyze the existing ways to develop intercultural competence through teaching a foreign language and particularly by using visualization in the English language class.

Existing culture has an obvious tendency towards visual, especially for its universal blazing-fast communication. The shift towards visual is gathering speed and the students should be ready to work with the visually loaded Web, social networks, mass media, and graphically sophisticated challenges at work. The leading approach in the study of this problem is the systematic methodological principle, which allows us to take into account a variety of factors and to exclude one-sidedness. The authors of the paper are trying to distinguish between active and passive visualizing (photos, graphs, infographics, and video) to develop intercultural competence in higher professional education. The research reveals that visual representation can be a helpful resource to build intercultural competence in a foreign language class alongside with other methods. The materials of the article can be interesting for a wide range of readers dealing with the problems of intercultural education and practical ways to build it in a class.

Keywords: student, learning, education, teaching, intercultural competence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of professional education to develop practical skills requires introducing more practical, time-saving approaches, methods, and techniques into teaching. The use of visual methods is determined by modern visually - dependent society mediating social interactions. Visuals are more likely to be processed in both verbal and visual systems, and hence the probability that they are retained in working memory and retrieved later from long-term memory is higher than when the presentation contains verbal information alone (Kobayashi, 1986). Visual literacy is considered to be one of the essential parts of modern education (Hattwig, Bussert, Medaille, Burgess, 2013,61-89), and there are already the standards of visual literacies created (ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education). Lázár (2003) claims

intercultural competence can actually be enhanced in EFL through different means such as speaking with members of a particular cultural background and using textbooks, media, documentaries, and movies.

So, developing intercultural competence in higher education in Russia is performed within the EFL course that will benefit greatly if try using new visual-based approaches in teaching.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research of developing intercultural competence (IC) was based on analyzing the pedagogical, psychological, linguo-didactic, linguistic and culture-related research on the issues of developing intercultural competence and communication; studying national and foreign language course books. The acquisition of intercultural competence is never complete and perfect, but to be a successful intercultural speaker and mediator does not require complete and perfect competence (Byram, 2002). The second part of our research concerns visual representation as a way, a method of developing IC among students and its inherent possibility to present culture being created by foreign nationals.

In teaching a foreign language in Russia visualizing as the principle of education and a way of presenting educational content has been existing since its early development. Yan A. Komenskiy called it "a golden rule" of methods of teaching and it has been interpreted in its wide meaning. The principle of visualization in Russian customary system of language teaching has been explained as a specially organized demonstration of language material and its use in a speech in order to help students to acquire this material (Belyaev, 2004) Then the principle supposes continual transition from unknown to a new knowledge.

Visual literacy in today's interpretation has been an area of study and investigation since the 1960s, and the 20 century is characterized by the time of 'visual turn' as a result of the cultural changes.

3. RESULTS

The 21st-century approach to visualization has changed drastically and is actively developing in various fields (Scientific, Educational, Information, Product, Visual analytics, etc.) and in terms of intercultural competence, it can be considered within two domains: as a method and as an object.

As a method, it creates images to present and/or analyze reality and as an object, it interprets the existing images.

As every branch of visualization develops its own taxonomy, the classification is incomplete, but from the least abstract to the most abstract one the visual representation includes: The more suitable types of visual representation that might be used in EFL class for introducing intercultural ideas:

1. Genuine visual objects - the objects as they are (e.g. historical and modern clothes, utensils, symbols);
2. Experimental rituality (experiments);
3. Sound;
4. Graphical representation (photos, movies, media, portraits, documents, movies, art objects, etc.);
5. Symbolic and data visualization (charts figures, tables, diagrams, maps, infographics);
6. Inner visualization (the images in one's imagination).

Visual representation might be illustrative and functional. (Zakharova, 2008, 156) The methods of teaching a language differentiate between active (productive skill) and passive (receptive) skills as the learners go from receptive to productive behavior. Working with visuals during the EFL class can be classified the same way. First, the students learn to understand, "read" the images and then try to create their own ideas through visual representation. Visual literacy is, hence, an important tool for critically decoding images and for deconstructing cultural stereotypes (Kellner, 2010).

Visual representation as a way of developing IC has some advantages, but it cannot substitute reading or other ways of interacting with culture (Table 1). Appropriate use and production of images in academic work appear to be a challenge for many students. Working with the texts from school the students tend to exhibit less comfort and skill with observing, interpreting, analyzing, and discussing visual information than they do with textual information and do so with less specificity (Hettwig, Bussert, Medaille, Burgess, 2013, 61-89)

Table 1. Textual vs. Visual Information in Building IC.

Text	Visual representation
Time-consuming	Quick
Less attractive to students	Attractive to students
Explicit vocabulary	Implicit vocabulary
Large vocabulary	Scarce vocabulary
Needs more preparation	No preparation needed (might be used instantly)
Abstract ideas can be explained verbally	May mispresent abstract ideas
Presentation is sequential	Nonlinear presentation

IC as a complex multilevel process consisting of motivational, contextual, organizational and evaluative components the interaction and integration of which enables the acquisition of intercultural knowledge and skills for effective intercultural communication. The Council of Europe defines intercultural competence as “The components of intercultural competence are knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values a person holds as a part of belonging to a number of social groups (Council of Europe, 2012). These values are also representative of a person’s social identities. Discussing the intercultural competence in educational settings, Alvino Fantini writes the following: “In this construct of ICC, there are also five dimensions. These are awareness, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and proficiency in the host tongue. (Fantini, 1999).

So, basing on Fantini's five basic elements of culture (awareness, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and proficiency in the host tongue) and our research objectives and in relation to a range of factors that influence the formation of intercultural competence within the framework of teaching a foreign language we visualized a process of interaction between visual representation and its influence on IC. By a combination of the factors, we mean the process and content of teaching in an optional presence in a real cross-cultural environment. (Scheme 1)

The student should have a large amount of knowledge and skills related to the studied culture (linguistic, culture-study, socio-linguistic, extralinguistic, etc.), and the existing values of the culture (and attitude to any other culture also).

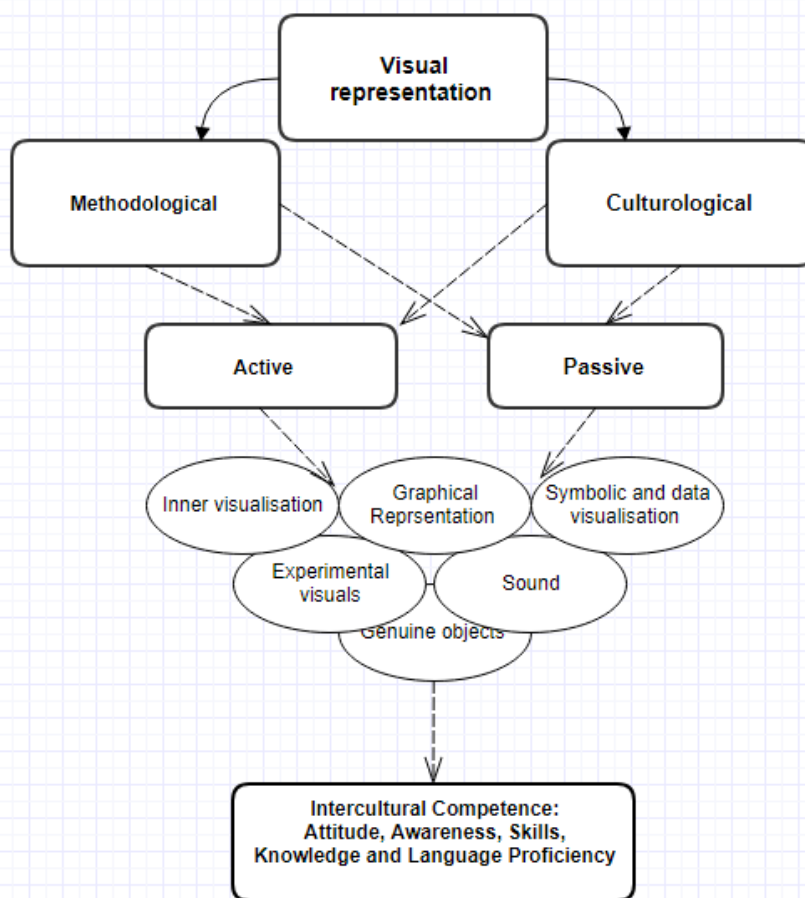


Fig 1. The Interaction between visual representation and Intercultural Competence.

The student should have a large amount of knowledge and skills related to the studied culture (linguistic, culture-study, socio-linguistic, extralinguistic, etc.), and the existing values of the culture (and attitude to any other culture also).

So, the student should have knowledge like:

- general information (history, geography, climate, state system, etc.): historic dates of the epic events, the facts of reality (the education system, economy, mass-media); famous people, the key events of social life, etc; the features of the social psychology and behavior; the stereotypes about the nation and country if there are any;
- the awareness of everything that makes the culture: the national communication culture, etiquette, the living conditions of the native speakers, their system of values. mentality, national character, etc.

The values-related knowledge assumes the awareness of the culture-bearers' attitude to the values (not the same as the students' attitude to another culture). For example, the relationships in the family, nation's attitude to history, monuments, time; national conflicts inside culture; acceptance of such common values as patriotism, sense of duty, fidelity; dealing with urgent challenges of today's life, such as terrorism, etc.

The methods of introducing culture and developing intercultural awareness and then competence include:

1. Photography. Analyzing and interpreting, discussing and finding implications if necessary. The photos intending to develop IC might include direct culture-related images or be implicit. 2. Making photos. Making unambiguous photos to be decoded in the class. In the beginning as "My family", "A traditional ritual" to more complicated "Social issues", "International negotiations", "Making pictures to a text" etc. First, it is important to introduce the idea and scaffold the technical process an quality, then move to the ideas and their various representation in pictures. (Taylor, 2002,123-139; Hannula,2013;).

2. Graphics. The methodology includes analyzing and decoding, discussing and finding implications in

various graphical documents. The crucial moment here is to choose a correct type of data representation as there is a great number of their kinds. The next important issue is to learn to show the image in your head correctly. To make it more culture-related they may represent the data about the country and its people e.g. a diagram of a country's population. Then gradually the students start making their own graphs and diagrams.

3. Picturing stories (Short, 2009, 1-10) This kind of activity helps students to proceed from reading to visualizing. students to map their own life journeys.

4. Making videos and presentations, of different kinds. When the students learn to decipher data represented by presentations, it is time to transform their data into visual representations.

The choice of methods conforms to the rules of teaching a language: from simple to more complicated ones, the methods should be age-specific, linguistically available and professionally - determined.

Developing intercultural competence as well as using visualization becomes a part of modern language education in Russia and if the methods of linguistic communicative competence have been developing for years, the methods of building intercultural competence are just appearing (Fahrutdinova, Grebtsova, 2014). The situation is complicated by the fact, that the foreign language classes in Russia are either monolingual or multilingual but there are no native English speakers present in the groups as a rule. Therefore, while the teacher can bring the language and linguistics into the class, he may not bring the culture if he is not a part of it. The class with the teacher may just get ready, learn, adopt a positive attitude to the culture they deal with, but not experience it.

4. DISCUSSION

The amount of research devoted to developing intercultural competence is growing every day (Bennet, 2015 InCA-project, 2009, Council of Europe, 2012) and the process of forming IC in pedagogy is still under discussion in both theoretic and methodological aspects due to the lack of study of the relation between the process of developing the IC and the structure and content of the pedagogical interaction. Moreover, despite thorough and multiple research studying the essence and constituents of the IC (Byram, Fantini, Dearnorff), the ways and conditions of its development, the problem of developing students' intercultural competence by means of the linguistics-related and culture-related disciplines seem to be understudied.

Here we come across a contradiction: the society requires the professionals showing a high level of IC, feeling confident in socio-cultural, cross-cultural environment, ready to communicate professionally with the representatives of other cultures on the one hand and insufficient development of the educational approaches to this objective on the other. Therefore we have made an attempt to deal with the problem of developing IC by means of visual representation in course of foreign language study.

5. CONCLUSION

The author's intention was to discuss a possibility of applying visual representation from the point of its didactic potential to develop students'. Visual representation might be used methodologically by itself and "culturally" providing knowledge, skills, the system of values and positive attitude to the culture under study. The second task was to offer some methods to teach visualizing with special attention to culture-related aspects.

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