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DEVELOPING CULTURAL AWARENESS IN THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Every culture has its own methods of educating its people. Currently, English is the lingua franca of international education. Indeed, without knowledge of English it is impossible for an individual to satisfactorily interact with their colleagues in other countries. However, while this is true as far as it goes, Russian is the lingua franca of education in the countries of the former USSR. Also, everyone should admit the growing importance of Mandarin Chinese. It is not unreasonable to assume that there is going to be an increasing need for non-native speakers to have knowledge of these languages.

Many linguists believe there is a close connection between the language lexicon and the culture of the people speaking it. The most obvious examples are some language-specific words that are widely used in one language but are unknown in others (e.g. *sushi, fish and chips, perestroika*). Furthermore, the same rules apply to people's attitudes, prejudices, and values [2]. It is advisable that the learners of foreign languages in the educational environment should not only acquire new words but also understand how L2 cultures reflected in conversational routines differ from their own culture [5].

It is thought that refusing to pay attention to words and semantic differences between words from different languages is one of the main reasons for miscommunication between different people. Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory and the theory of Cultural Scripts developed by Anna Wierzbicka are believed to solve this problem [1].

Wierzbicka argues that, in order to communicate effectively, people should be able to use the same concepts. However, she believes that the majority of the lexicon of any language is culture-specific i.e. the concepts underlying the words in different languages are not the same [2]. That is why comparative linguistic analysis of different languages is very likely to be inaccurate unless a universal basis is used.

Furthermore, Wierzbicka claims that concepts are shaped by culture, history, and education, and concludes that changes in a society can result in

modification of the meanings of culture-specific words (e.g. changes in human relations over centuries caused devaluation of the English word 'friend') [2]. This, therefore, results in semantic differences between words from different languages.

According to Wierzbicka, one source of information for the semantic differences between the languages is 'key words', the ones which are said to be 'of special importance in a given culture' [2, c.16]. She believes that, by analysing these 'key words' one can learn a lot about people's attitudes, values, expectations or conversational routines which determine culture-specific cultural scripts [2].

Wierzbicka shows that conceptual systems in different languages are unlike and, in order to be able to compare them, one would need to find a common measure. She believes that all languages 'exhibit both differences and similarities; that the study of diversity can lead to the discovery of universals' [2, p. 23]. Also, she claims that these language universals comprise a culture-independent Metalanguage and can be used to 'study both diversity and universality of culture and cognition' [4, p. 260]. This belief prompted her to introduce Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory.

The practical value of NSM theory is obvious: it can help us to realise successful communication in the educational environment. It is very useful for students to learn semantic differences in their L1 and target language in order to avoid disappointment or misunderstanding. Wierzbicka insists that, to understand people that belong to an alien culture, one should learn to 'hear' speaking patterns in their proper cultural context and try to understand the underlying cultural scripts and these tasks can successfully be accomplished in the L2 classes [3].

Closely connected to NSM is the theory of Cultural Scripts. It is believed that 'the way we speak reflects the way we think' [2, p. 22]. So, cultural scripts can be seen as 'representations of cultural norms that are widely held in a given society and that are reflected in language' [3, p. 401] (e.g. in Russia children are taught not to use 'ty' but 'vy' when addressing adults outside the family circle).

The key idea of the theory of cultural scripts is that these shared social ways of thinking can be identified by analysing culture-specific "key-words", "phrases, and conversational routines from a point of view of a cultural insider. The cultural norms and values reflected in language should be

analysed and used in language teaching, cross-cultural education and intercultural communication.

To conclude, the potential for misunderstanding for speakers of foreign languages is considerable. The twin concepts of Natural Semantic Metalanguage and Cultural Scripts are such methods which can be used to study the lexical and semantic primitives whose meanings are the same across cultures and therefore assist intercultural dialogue.

Literature

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БАСНЯ ЭЗОПА: ПОСЛАНИЕ ВНЕ ВРЕМЕНИ И ПРОСТРАНСТВА

Исследователи всего мира стремятся разгадать тайну древних текстов — носителей наставлений и нравочучений, исходящих из глубины античных цивилизаций. Наиболее привлекательными в этом смысле оказались басни Эзопа, ставшие частью индоевропейской и мировой культуры, строки из которых цитируют на разных языках учителя, ученики и их родители. Одна из отличительных композиционных частей басни — мораль — располагается, как правило, в заключительной части и представляет собой логический, поучительный вывод либо авторское послание читателю.