

**СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНАЯ КОМПЕТЕНЦИЯ КАК ВАЖНЫЙ  
КОМПОНЕНТ ПРОЦЕССА ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ИНОСТРАННОГО  
ЯЗЫКА**

**SOCIOCULTURAL COMPETENCE AS AN ESSENTIAL PART  
OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS**

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Language Learning is learning of communication. ‘Communication’, to quote Adrian Palmer, ‘implies novelty. If all responses were predictable, there would be no communication. Therefore, the teacher should train the student to take the proper attitude toward the unknown, both in understanding and in producing speech’ [2, p. 31].

International communication also requires that careful and conscious attention ought to be given to cultural differences. It is known that whereas some sociocultural aspects of communication are universal, many others are culture specific, either openly or covertly. Learners’ unawareness of the

associations that a speaker of the target language has may lead to disturbance or even communication breakdown.

Among cultural interferences scientists highlight such as the lack of semantic equivalents in the native language for some lexical elements of a foreign language, the lack of background knowledge of geography, history, sociology, economics, religion and culture. Apart from a verbal code of communication there are non-verbal means of communication, which must not be forgotten as well.

Due to this fact, such aspects as acquiring communicative competence and developing sociocultural competence have gained increasing importance. Moreover, sociocultural competence is supposed to help in achieving general educational aims through the pursuit of subject specific aims. Hence, nowadays language teachers are trying to incorporate sociocultural factors into their classrooms. In fact, it is from the very first language lesson the acquisition of sociocultural competence must be inseparable from the acquisition of linguistic competence.

At Voronezh State University first-year students of science departments are taught English for General Purposes. In accordance with the curriculum of the English language the themes are to be dealt with during the academic year include home and families, hobbies and interests, shopping habits, food and drink, leisure activities, rural and urban living, wildlife, arts, travelling, sports, languages and communication, customs and traditions.

These particular themes have been included in the list because they are socioculturally marked and can exhibit sociocultural characteristics of the foreign language community.

In dealing with the suggested themes, different learning activities tend to be used.

Learning activities done in the form of a project seem to be particularly suitable for the acquisition of both linguistic and sociocultural competences. Besides, even the students whose English level is not high enough may be fruitfully engaged in such activities.

It must be also mentioned, that if the learning content matches the learner's own opinions, attitudes, experiences and interests and if the learning activities engage the learner not only as a learner but as a human being, the development of sociocultural competence can be more effectively promoted.

A good activity which can help teachers make students gain sociocultural competence is to organize an International Day or Week at English lessons. Students are asked to work in small groups, choosing a country where they, for example, would like to study, work or live. Then they look for and put together different facts, peculiarities, interesting points concerning a certain country. During the International Day/Week they share their gathered

information with other students. It is advisable that students make presentations on a subject of their choice. It is worth saying that, such presentations can be done in the form of dancing, storytelling, traditional crafts, games and others [3, p. 160].

‘Another strategy is to invite native speakers or proficient non-native speakers of English to come to class and speak on a specific aspect of their own culture’ [1, p. 8]. It is recommended for the students to prepare the questions in advance. It is also important for the guests to ‘be able to distinguish between their personal experience and what is true of their culture in general’ [1, p. 8].

The essence of such meetings is that they should lead to reflection on the learners’ own experiences of and attitudes towards discussed topics in confrontation with those of their invited guests.

One more language learning activity which can help teachers encourage learners to explore new cultures and apply their acquired knowledge is the use of role play.

On the one hand it might be challenging, especially for beginners or anxious learners. But, on the other hand, it is an extremely effective technique if the students are confident and cooperative and the language demanded is well within the learners’ capacity.

As the world is becoming more open and interconnected, people must understand that it is more important than ever to know not only other cultures, but their own as well. ‘In doing so, they will be better prepared to participate more fully in the global community – of which their local community is a part’ [1, p. 11].

The acquisition of sociocultural competence contributes to the achievement of such general educational aims as:

- 1) providing insight into other ways of thinking and other modes of behaviour;
- 2) understanding and accepting people with different social and ethnic backgrounds, avoiding stereotyping;
- 3) raising and creating awareness of sociocultural constraints on the learners’ own behaviour patterns;
- 4) raising cultural awareness of learners’ native culture in contrast to the diversity of other cultures.

To sum up, sociocultural competence, in our view, is an essential element of foreign language learning for all target groups at all levels. It has the greatest significance for those learners who are going to spend their lives, wholly or partly, in a foreign language environment. It is also important for those who use a foreign language primarily as a lingua franca, as an international means of communication with both native and non-native

speakers. In order to establish full and effective communication it is necessary for speakers to be aware of the sociocultural implications of the language forms they are using.

### REFERENCES

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