

Intercultural Foreign Language Communication Teaching of 1st Year Students with Non-Linguistic Major

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n2s1p11

Abstract

The research was conducted to study the intercultural foreign language communication based on the variation in the types of communication ranging from the subject-role and social-role to the personal-role communication and its influence on the development of foreign language communication of 1st year students with non-linguistic majors on the base level. The aim was to develop the foreign language teaching technology which allows to involve all interacting participants. Moreover, the following technology teaches students how to compare and contrast socio-cultural communication situation and it assists in realizing the potential of the foreign language as the means of communication and interaction with the native speakers as well as in teaching the joint educational activity. Teaching experiment consisted of the following stages: pre-experimental test; experimental teaching to the intercultural communication; post-experimental test; analysis of quantitative and qualitative results of the experimental teaching. The obtained experimental results reflected the formed learning abilities of subject-role, social-role and personal-role communication thus confirming the efficiency of the proposed technology of intercultural foreign language communication teaching and therefore the validity of the hypothesis.

Keywords: intercultural foreign language communication, subject-role, social-role communication and personal-role communication.

1. Introduction

Currently the system of language education has been subjected to the significant changes in both organizational and substantive aspects. The new European realities understand a foreign language teaching as the intercultural one, with the main purpose being forming of foreign language communicative competence, i.e. ability and willingness to perform foreign language interpersonal and intercultural communication.

Intercultural communication assumes familiarity with cultural information, the assimilation of lexical units which reflect the uniqueness of the people culture of the target country, familiarity with the most typical traditions, mastering speech and behavioral etiquette in accordance with the national characteristics of the native speaker. Contact with the mentality and way of life of other people can form the students' understanding of the world diversity and develop such personal qualities as openness, tolerance and willingness to dialogue with representatives of other social and cultural communities.

Intercultural communication has traditionally attracted the attention of many linguists, teachers, public figures (Straffon, D. A., 2003; Knapp K, 2004; Heringer, Z. J., 2004; Gröschke, D., 2009; Benseler, F., 2003; Atay, D., Kurt G., Çamlıbel, Z., Ersin, P., & Kaslioglu, Ö., 2009). A number of papers dedicated to the intercultural teaching in higher education, intercultural education and training has recently been published. However, these studies did not provide the step-by-step description of intercultural foreign language communication teaching process.

It should be noted, that the process of intercultural foreign language communication teaching in theoretical and practical terms is still underdeveloped. Furthermore, analyzing the modern educational tools in foreign languages for non-linguistic high schools, we have found that the technology of intercultural foreign language communication teaching is insufficiently developed.

The aim of our research is to develop theoretically sound and experimentally proven technology of foreign language communication teaching for the first-year students with non-linguistic major.

In accordance with the aim, we stated the following objectives:

to provide the literature analysis relating to the subject of our study;

- to create the technology of foreign language communication teaching by means of the subject-role and social-role to the personal-role communication teaching;
- to provide experimental validation of the proposed technology.

Some materials developers say that full foreign communication involves fluent use of the language means, however the majority of 1st year students of non-linguistic majors do not have sufficient volume of language and speech tools of the foreign languages they study, moreover they do not know cultural features of communication. We have formulated the hypothesis that the targeted training of intercultural foreign language communication based on the variation in the types of communication ranging from the subject-role and social-role to the personal-role communication and using technology developed by us can assist in the development of foreign language communication of 1st year students with non-linguistic majors on the base level.

2. Method

Traditionally the formation of speech skills in all kinds of speech activity meant the development of the reproductive abilities on the basis of specially selected, methodically processed language and speech material. Without denying the need for the development of the reproductive abilities, nevertheless the focus should be given to the intercultural foreign language communication.

We have developed a technology of intercultural foreign language communication teaching which provides level-based and gradual mastery of subject-role, social-role and personal-role communication.

When working on the technology of intercultural communication teaching, we relied on the phased formation of intercultural competence developed by Furmanova V. P. (1994), who identified four phases: information, comparative, adaptation and application. In the first phase, students learn cultural information, unknown facts about the country of the target language, the rules of communication and accepted standards of conduct, etc. Comparative phase involves teaching the students to find common and specific features in the situation they have listened to, the video they have watched, or the text they have read – all these key elements form the students' understanding of the cultural behavior pattern of a native speaker in a given situation. In the adaptation phase the elements of foreign language culture are projected on the students, i.e., on the subject who is learning foreign languages. Application phase is an "immersion" in the studied culture, which is carried out through a reproduction of a foreign environment.

Let us consider the developed technology in more detail. Intercultural foreign language communication is suggested to be taught via subject-role, social-role and personal-role communication.

Social-role communication can be taught on the basis of the listening comprehension consisting of two or three short dialogues. The first dialogue reflects the socio-cultural situation which refers to the reality surrounding students. The second dialogue reflects the socio-cultural situation in the country of the target language for the same spheres of communication. Teacher suggests the following tasks:

- understand the content of the first dialogue;
- understand the contents of the second dialogue;
- find similarities and differences in two different socio-cultural situations;
- connect the two situations in one dialogue with some transformation;
- dramatize independently compiled dialogues in doubles (group) interaction.

Teaching subject-role and social-role communication can be carried out on the basis of the reading comprehension. Students learn to communicate in groups relying on the cross-cultural theme, situation, new information or problem contained in the text. Here, the following routine must be observed in the work:

- reading comprehension and work on the content of the text;
- development of skills to convert text into spoken utterances of participants;
- preparation for dramatizing the text;
- dramatizing the piece of the text in small groups;
- summary of the interaction.

Technology of personal-role communication teaching involves exchanges of views and personal impressions on the basis of listening or reading comprehensions. Students learn to characterize the actors of the text and socio-cultural situation in the country of the target language as well as to compare it with a similar socio-cultural situation in the home country. In personal-role communication teaching the teacher is suggested the following sequence of work:

- how to express partially independent opinion;
- how to agree or disagree during the joint work on drawing up a short story;
- how to draw up an emotionally expressive story in small groups.

3. Treatment

Efficiency of the presented method was tested in the course of experimental training in order to confirm or refute the hypothesis stated at the beginning. Teaching experiment consisted of the following stages: pre-experimental test; experimental teaching to the intercultural communication; post-experimental test; analysis of quantitative and qualitative results of the experimental teaching.

The goal of the pre-experimental test was to define the initial level of:

1. the ability to perform subject-role, social-role and personal-role communication in various forms of social interaction;
2. background knowledge about the target country;
3. the ability to compare the facts and phenomena between native and foreign cultures.

The pre-experimental test covered 1st year students of the Institute of Humanities, Social Studies and Technologies. In order to establish the level of skills in the subject-role communication students in the experimental and control groups were offered to stage a fairytale «Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten». Readiness for the subject-role communication was assessed using the following criteria:

- role taking – adequate match with the character, emotional performance in accordance with the characteristics of the character, artistry in behavior. This criterion was estimated as 1 point for each participant;
- the criterion of interactivity – evaluated by the following criteria: the presence of contact between the participants of communication; understanding of the interlocutor, active behavior. This criterion amounts to 3 points;
- the criterion of the number of utterances of each participant – utterances which do not reflect the content of the story were not taken into account.

After the staging almost similar results in the control and experimental groups were obtained:

1. more than 80% of students took the roles in subject-role communication by clearly-set situations from the familiar fairy tale;
2. interactivity criterion was less than 50%;
3. the number of utterances per student is less than 4 which did not confirm our assumption that each participant is able to express at least 5 and more utterances.

The 2nd pre-experimental test was aimed at identifying the initial level of readiness for social-role communication in the form of pair work. We have formulated the assumption that the dialogic form of social-role communication will be considered be successful if students have taken the social roles, if there will be an interaction between the students and in the presence of conventional utterances.

We formulated the following criteria for the social-role communication evaluation:

- criterion of social roles taking- a student comprehends the content of the role easily, has positive attitude towards it, and has the ability of dramatic identification. Failure to take the role – i.e. the student is unable to cope with the function of social role (a negative attitude to the role);
- the criterion of interaction – is the emergence of interaction, contact with other roles, mutual perception and interpretation of the relevant speech acts of the interlocutor;
- the criterion of expressing the conventional utterances – greeting, farewell, gratitude, apologies, addressing, courtesy (maximum 4 conventional utterances possible: greetings, apologies, gratitude).

To identify the initial level of the social-role communication a group was divided into dyads which were offered the following social situation: the seller and the buyer. The buyer chooses a birthday present. The seller asks whom the present is intended for and offers a variety of options.

According to the obtained results, 70% of the students masters and understands the function of the social role and are able to simulate it. The interactivity index was 40%, as not all students are able to interact with each other, rather poorly understand and interpret speech acts of the partner, seek to fulfill their own role. We understand that the division of interactivity into its component parts (contact, mutual perception, interpretation of speech acts of the partner) is conventional, since all the qualities of interactivity in real communication are closely linked and intertwined. Conventional division into these parts allows to calculate the interaction coefficient more accurately and identify the components of interactivity, which need to be addressed in training process. The analysis of the interaction coefficient showed that all components of interactivity are not sufficiently formed by 1st year students. Number of conventional utterances per student amounts to 2 in average, which proves only 50% of our assumption that each participant is able to express at least 4 utterances. This figure indicates that students rarely use courtesy phrases in their speech.

The 3rd test was aimed at identifying readiness for personal-role communication. Before the testing we also

formulated the assumption that if a student expresses his/her personal opinion and personal attitude to the subject of communication and gives proper reasoning, expresses agreement / disagreement, convinces, refutes, proves, statements are emotionally colored, uses non-verbal means of communication (gestures, facial expressions), – the personal-role communication was successful.

To evaluate the personal-role communication the following criteria were developed:

- personal relation to the object (subject) statements;
- reasoning;
- the ability to agree (disagree).

As well as in previous cases quantitative criteria were expressed in points, equivalent to the number of utterances. As the personal-role communication does not suggest public speaking, the teacher (experimenter) listens to each student individually.

Each student is offered three tourist catalogues and the task, "Where would you like to go and why?".

Following results were obtained:

- 1st year students are able to express their own attitudes to the subject of communication (coefficient of the personal attitude to the subject of the communication was 30%);
- the ability to argue and defend their views (coefficient of reasoning was 25%) is less developed;
- students cannot express agreement / disagreement with the opinion of the interlocutor (coefficient of agreement / disagreement phrases was 38%).

The purpose of the 4th pre-experimental test was to determine the initial level of background knowledge of the target language country. Before testing we took into account the fact that the 1st year students already have some notion of Germany. We have suggested that if the students give the correct answers to all the questions proposed, the level of background knowledge is high and they are ready to develop intercultural competence as a component of foreign language communicative competence.

Each student was offered to answer the following 8 questions:

- Where is Germany?
- Name the German cities.
- Give any German names.
- Name German companies.
- What are the German words in the Russian language.
- Which brand of German cars do you know?
- What do people eat in Germany?
- Name the German holidays.

This test has shown that students have an average level of background knowledge of the target language (35%). For example, only 3 German cities were named: Berlin, Munich, Bremen. From food products different brands of yogurt, chocolate «Alpen Gold», German beers were named. As for cars, students recalled «BMW», «Mercedes», «Audi».

Basing on the results of the pre-experimental test analysis the following conclusions were made:

1. Readiness to subject-role communication is quite high, but the ability to communicate in group is still underdeveloped.
2. Readiness to dialogic form of communication is satisfactory whereas the level of interaction is low.
3. Students are able to express their personal attitude to the reality, but most of the answers have no proper reasoning.
4. Due to the weak background knowledge it is possible to observe the low level of intercultural competence development.

Performed test showed the complexity in the organization of group work as well as intragroup and intergroup communication. We have highlighted the fact that in every group there is a leader who is trying to speak for the whole group solely.

3.1 Experimental Teaching

Experimental teaching was conducted in groups of 1st year students in a subgroup A., where the experimenter worked. A subgroup B was selected as a control group. These were first year students of the Institute of Humanities, Social Sciences and Technologies.

Experimental material included training materials developed by the experimenter. In the control group the "Tangram 1" textbook was used.

The structure of the lesson in the experimental group was as follows: lesson begins with a greeting and small talk with students: *Wie geht's? Ich freue mich, euch (wieder) zu sehen! Hoffentlich sind alle gesund.*

After that:

1. lead-in. The goal - an introduction to foreign language atmosphere. In the warming up activity a new language and speech material as well as the new situation of communication are given;
2. discuss the situation of communication with students;
3. the stage of forming the phonetic, lexical and grammatical skills in this experiment is not described;
4. listening comprehension of short authentic dialogs with subsequent dramatizing. These texts are recorded as a small role plays. During one lesson two such dialogues could be presented, playing time ranges from 2 to 3 minutes;
5. talking with students about the subject of the conversation, about the characters, the place where a conversation took place. Then students dramatize the dialogue;
6. the stage of personal-role communication. Students are encouraged to make up a dialogue (the time to prepare is 3-4 minutes, the work is done in pairs or in small groups with a gradual decrease in preparation time) and in the end of this work some students can build their dialogs without preparation. The dialogs should include speech clichés; express the emotional state of dialogue participants or their attitude to the statement of the partner. Dialogue should be conducted according to the rules of speech etiquette (*Es tut mir leid! Wirklich? Na, klar! Oh, wie komisch! Ah, wo!*). The prepared statement should contain not less than 5 and more utterances for each communication partner excluding greetings and farewells;
7. social-role communication stage. It can be recommended to make a role play in which students perform speech acts in an imaginary situation. Roles are distributed and are characterized by a teacher or the students themselves choose their roles. Students can also play themselves. In preparation for the role play different masks, mime, pictures, etc. can be used;
8. the stage of summarizing the results of the lessons.

In the process of experiential teaching, learning sessions were conducted with a full training package and not by the individual steps from the experimental materials. However, we describe only those points that are aimed at teaching to subject-role, social-role and personal-role communication.

The aim of social-role communication teaching was to teach students to adopt social roles, i.e. understand its status and mode of communication. Students learned to use phrases for making requests, reporting, greeting, farewell, gratitude, apologies, invitations; they mastered nonverbal communication, using gestures and facial expressions; got acquainted with speech and non-speech behavior of native speakers, the country of the target language.

The aim of subject-role communication teaching was to:

- to teach how to adopt the role of the plot, i.e. nonverbal and verbal behavior should match the content of the story;
- to respond to verbal and nonverbal behavior of the partners in dialogue in accordance with their roles;
- to use phrases that match the accepted role.

Special attention is paid not only to the ability to behave in accordance with their role, but also, above all, to perceive and understand the role of the interlocutor(s), i.e., intragroup interaction.

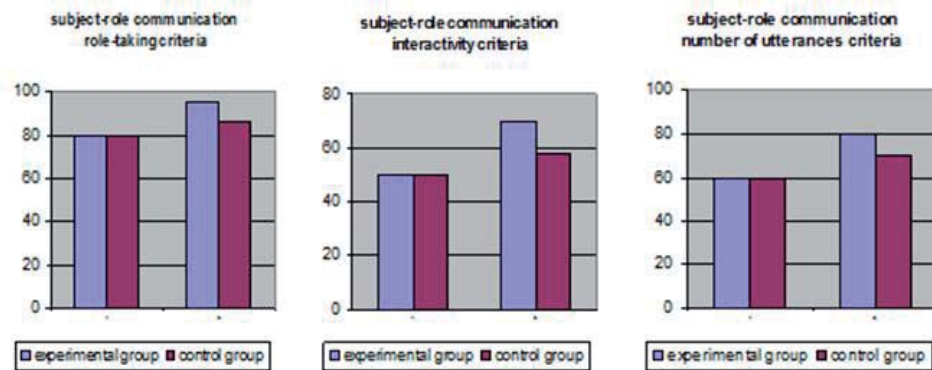
The aim of the personal-role communication teaching was to:

- to teach the learner to interact with the interlocutor, i.e. be able to express the attitude to the subject (object) of discussion, to give reasons;
- be able to express agreement / disagreement with the opinion of other participants in the communication;
- listen to others and respect their opinion;
- react with emotional phrases to establish interpersonal relationships.

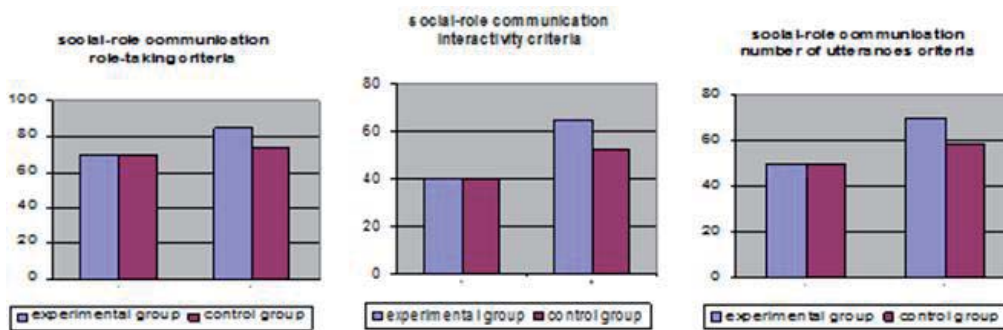
4. Assessments

In the end of the first year the post-experimental test was performed and it revealed the following results:

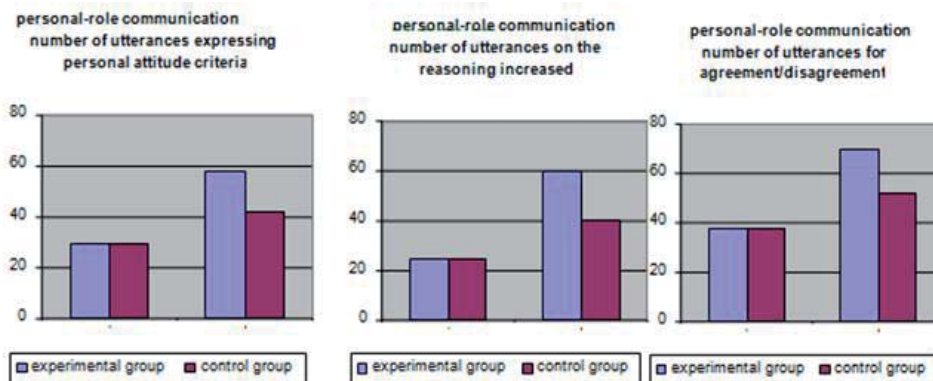
- The ability of subject-role communication increased (growth rate on such criteria as "role-taking" is 15% in the EG, whereas in the CG this criterion increased by 6%; criterion of interactivity increased by 20% in the EG and by 8% in the CG, the number of utterances in percent also increased by 20% in the EG and by 10% in the CG correspondingly). Dynamics of changes in subject-role communication can be seen in the following graphs which represent quantitative indicators of pre-experimental (1), and post-experimental (2) tests:



- Readiness to social-role communication was tested during the discussion in pairs of following situation: «Ihr seid zum Geburtstag eures Freundes eingeladen. Besprecht, was jeder von euch zum Geburtstag kocht, macht oder mischt». Growth rate in terms of "Role -taking" in the EG was 15%, while that in the CG – 4%; "Interaction" criterion growth in the EG – 25% whereas in the CG – 12%. Number of conventional utterances percentage increased by 20% in the EG, and 8% in the CG. These data suggest that nearly all the students in EG adopted their social roles and were able to simulate them, to improve communication with each other.



- the ability and readiness to the personal-role communication was tested in triads during discussion of pictures showing the holidays: «Weihnachten», «Neujahrsfest», «Ostern» and corresponding task «Welches Fest feiert ihr am liebsten und warum?». It should be noted that the students have learned to argue and defend their views in a foreign language. Number of utterances expressing personal attitude to the subject in percent increased by 28% and 12% in the EG and CG correspondingly. Also the percent rate of the number of utterances on the reasoning increased as well: 60% and 15% in the EG and CG correspondingly. The percentage of the average number of utterances for agreement/ disagreement increased by 32% and 14% in the EG and CG correspondingly.



5. Results

The obtained experimental results reflected the formed learning abilities of subject-role, social-role and personal-role communication thus confirming the efficiency of the proposed technology of intercultural foreign language communication teaching and therefore the validity of the hypothesis. These techniques and tasks were selected due to the fact that they can reach the main goal –foreign language communication teaching; involve all participants in the interaction; teach to compare and contrast similarities and differences in socio-cultural communication situations in the home country and in the country of the target language; allow to realize the possibility of using the target language as a means of communication and interaction with people of other cultures and teach how to cooperate with other participants of communication.

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