

*O.A. Petrova
National research
Tomsk polytechnic university
Tomsk, Russia*

Using authentic video to form cultural and social competences in a technical university

In the modern globalized world we often meet people of different cultures. The people's continuous interaction from different countries and of different cultures is evident. This interaction can be mentioned in almost any sphere, and every day it grows, involving new people into such interaction. Of course, we understand that in order to maintain the communication people need to have necessary set of skills and competences. It means the knowledge of the different cultural aspects of any particular country, such as linguistic, aesthetic, ethical, etc. In other words, a person must have formed the social-cultural competences for the country on the other side of communication.

Before speaking of cultural competence it is necessary to find out the meaning of that term. Referring to the various sources and having summarised the available information, we can conclude that competence is a set of activity or sphere of questions in which the person is competent or well-informed. Also, competence is the ability to live and interact in modern multicultural world. Thus, social and cultural competence plays a unique role in man's formation in society. It is necessary to take into account many cultural peculiarities, such as customs, norms, social attitude, non-verbal communication rules, social stereotypes, etc., which are suitable to a particular country. Thus, via communication we can avoid some embarrassing situations that may happen due to our incompetence. Also, the formation of social and cultural competences is supposed to overcome xenophobia and existing stereotypes, which are formed irrespectively of our wishes. As a rule, these real stereotypes interfere our communication with people of different cultures later. Besides this, socio-cultural competence brings up tolerance towards the representatives of different cultures inside us.

From the foregoing, it is clear that a person should have the basis of social and cultural competences, that they can develop later, forming a stable construction of knowledge. No doubt, the earlier a person starts to expand their knowledge in various cultural aspects, the better it will be. So, the work on the elementary cultural peculiarities and aspects basis formation starts with the introduction of educational process in life. After mastering the basic information takes place subsequent competence formation. The basis and the subsequent formation of social and cultural competences among the students is carried out directly during the English lessons (or lesson of any other language). During the lessons students face either cultural peculiarities of the foreign language or the country itself. Without references to the culture of studied language, the learning of foreign language can be considered incomplete and even meaningless. Also, via study of another culture by comparing both countries students begin to understand the peculiarities of their own culture, that is useful and important for people who consider themselves as parts of the whole communication.

Discussing the relationship between the social and cultural competences formation and the main objectives of education, such as developmental, educational or practical, we can say that they are inextricably linked. In other words, learning a foreign language, a person forms not only the culture of the world in the mind, but develops a desire to participate in intercultural communication.

What are the ways to achieve the social competence formation that is so necessary?

According to many experts, the most effective means of developing social and cultural competences is to live in a country of studied language and to immerse in the atmosphere of its culture, traditions, customs and social norms. However, in most cases, students do not have such opportunity, and it's necessary to find out effective ways and means to develop social and cultural competences outside the language environment.

Of course, the major component of the competences formation is the educational material. It can be expressed in the form of text, dialogue, poem, letter, etc. However, there are other options to develop competences. One of the options is to use authentic video in the form of movies or TV series. Learning a foreign language using authentic video has several advantages. Firstly, most of the actors use «spoken» language. That is, looking at such video, student will become familiar with the «living» language, and not adapted bookish phrases. Secondly, the interest of watching a movie or TV series may serve as a stimulus to language learning (see [1] for more motivation-forming techniques). That is, unlike other sources of information, a lot of people have fun while watching videos. Video materials with subtitles are precisely those that combine «pleasant and useful» at the same time.

In our case, we chose the US TV series of 60th's, and our choice was not accidental. Firstly, the reason to use such video is that the television has not gone so far from the theater, and it has its particular advantages. The «theatrical» series and little slang make it easy to understand foreign speech. In addition, the pronunciation is more clear and legible, because it had to compensate for poor quality of sound recording equipment of the time. That helps to assimilate the information better. In order to verify this and to compare the differences a modern video was shown. The difference was noticeable almost from the first minute. Speech in the modern authentic video material was more difficult to understand because of different speech tokens that are inherent in the culture. Also, speech didn't consist of simple short sentences that facilitate the understanding of what you heard, but of long sentences, in which words almost merged together and the meaning of them was pretty hard at the same time.

Secondly, as the series shows some aspects of our lives, we can identify some specific moments in communication between people through specific visual examples. For example, the non-verbal communication between the characters is largely unchanged through time (gestures, facial expressions, intonation, etc) but comparing gestures in modern video and 60ths, people can determine what is the basis of a non-verbal communication in the culture and does not pertain to its temporary stage.

Thirdly, the possibility that students watched this video previously is very small. So, teacher will simply find out who really understands the meaning of what they saw and heard and not who simply remembers the contents of the video watched in Russian.

Of course, there are also disadvantages in this case. Firstly, the idea of racism that was quite a normal situation is clearly reflected. African Americans and other ethnic groups that differ from Americans were mostly absent in scenes of everyday life in those series or constrained to a set of stereotypes (Chinese laundry, African American porter, etc). Although the reality was different. Now, in modern times, the reality is displayed as it is. In other words, we can easily see the scene where people of different nationalities participate. Secondly, another idea, as sexism, appeared in those series. In the series, women played the secondary role in society. It means that women were simply housewives or wives. In the series of those years we didn't see any women in leading positions or working with men. If women and men may be on the same level and have the same positions in society in the modern series, in the series of the 60s a clear distinction was set between the role of men and women.

Well, we watched videos by small coherent segments, then discussed what happened to that moment and what features were presented in speech, behavior, environment, etc. Watching series helps expand the boundaries of social and cultural competences. Remembering the specific visual examples and discussing the information makes our knowledge to grow and our intellectual equipment to develop, which is the main aim of foreign language study.

References

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Scientific supervisor: D.V. Shepetovsky, senior teacher of TPU (Tomsk polytechnic university), Russia