

## FORMATION OF COMMON CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN COUNTRY STUDIES CLASSES (BASED ON TURKISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PRACTICE)

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been a growing interest in promoting the acquisition of common cultural competence in foreign language education. Thus, the present paper looks into methodological frameworks of developing common cultural competence in country studies classes through the Turkish language. Special attention is paid to theoretical basis of country studies teaching methods as well as comparative analysis of academic syllabi and training materials. Fundamental educational principles implemented in teaching country studies (Turkey) and compiling course guides are revealed. System-based approach to the research problem suggests the analysis of methodological frameworks offered by Russian and foreign specialists. The results show that in teaching a foreign language, particularly Turkish, classes of country studies enable learners to acquire simultaneously the knowledge of culture, history, ethnology of the Turkish people, which in its turn contributes to strengthening their motivation to communicate, broadens their cultural horizons and encourages teachers to diversify methods of teaching and classroom applications. The paper findings may be useful in academic studies of the research problem or in foreign language teaching practice.

**Keywords:** linguistics, language education, country studies, teaching methods, oriental languages, Turkish language

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Relevance of research topic**

Studying of any foreign language as a means of communication should go in hand with learning the cultural aspects of the country and its people. First of all, language is in existence in the world of its speakers and learning of any language without considering this world, the country (geography, the population), culture, history, turns it into a passive language; hence, deprives students of an opportunity to use this language as a means of communication. In accordance with the objectives of teaching a foreign language, Turkish in particular, teachers and methodologists are faced with the problem of teaching it in combination with social and cultural life of the country.

Similarly, teaching Turkish in higher educational institutions is carried out in conjunction with the culture, ethnology and history of the Turkish people, economic and physical geography of Turkey, Turkish literature and folklore, and others. Some of the aspects are taught as separate courses if it is available due to the curriculum; in other cases students are provided with the necessary knowledge in classes of country studies.

Additionally, learning cultural, social, economic life, history and ethnography of native speakers will foster the understanding of the specific uses of speech forms, semantic features, political, cultural, historical, and other similar characteristics of words and speech patterns.

Thus, the relevance of the research topic is determined by shortage of methodological literature on teaching Turkish as a foreign language in higher schools, lack of methodological bases for the development of common cultural competencies indicated in educational standards.

### **1.2 Status of a Problem**

While teaching Turkish as a foreign language, students, who major in different academic disciplines such as philology, oriental studies, history, foreign regional studies and the international relations at the Kazan federal university, are offered the course of country studies. Country studies are closely connected with academic courses focused on the development of speaking practice, some theoretical disciplines like lexicology and phraseology. Besides, country studies are directly related to such disciplines as the culture and history of the country, in the instant case the Republic of Turkey. While compiling the content of the course syllabus, the basic knowledge was made up with regard to the competencies which students will acquire in the learning process of above mentioned disciplines that eventually will promote a more successful perception of the information on country studies. A wide scope of the course material and variety of the suggested topics facilitate the

accomplishment of close links between country studies and practical acquisition of the language. It would be right to say that some topics included in the syllabus of country studies course may partially coincide with those covered in the practical course classes of Turkish.

If to address theoretical and methodological bases of country studies as an academic subject, it should be noted that it was firstly indicated as a separate subject in teaching a foreign language by Vereshchagin and Kostomarov's research work "A linguistic problem of area studies in teaching Russian to foreigners" in 1971 (Vereshchagina, Kostomarov, 1980). Country studies was initially considered as "the field of methodology dealing with the research of ways and methods of acquainting foreign students with the reality of the target language speaking country in the process of learning and by means of the target language". In the 1990s, the content of country studies syllabus was clarified and began to be treated as "a methodological discipline practically fulfilling in educational process the selection and performance of information about national and cultural features of speech communication of a linguistic persona for the purpose of achieving communicative competence" (Shchukin, 1990). Today, in higher educational institutions there is a tendency to differentiate between "country studies", "cultural studies", "area studies" and "cultural linguistics".

The problem of connection between area studies and foreign language teaching gained in significance in higher education in the second half of the 20th century (Alikberova, 2015). Nowadays, the course of "Country Studies" simultaneously pursues both the goals of teaching and the development of communication skills of students. Thus, in classes of country studies the subject matter is a certain unity of geographical, social, ethnographic and cultural elements. According to Tomakhin, "area studies is an educational discipline, whose subject is a specifically selected and organized set of economic, socio-political, historical, geographical and other knowledge connected with the content and form of communication of native speakers", which is inserted in educational process "for the purpose of achieving the educational and instructional goals and related to fulfilling communicative needs of students in a target language" (Tomakhin, 1996). Shchukin states that area studies is "a basic methodological science, whose subject is a body of data on the target language country". The information about the area "meets not only informative but also communicative needs of students, enabling the formation of communicative and sociocultural competence" (Shchukin, 1990).

1.3 The place of country studies as an academic course in the process of teaching Turkish Country studies is considered both as part of the practical course of a foreign language and part of the theoretical course of its teaching methods. While shaping the content of the course syllabus of country studies as an academic subject, in teaching process take place the selection and presentation of the information containing ethnic and cultural elements of speech communication which aims to develop communicative competence of students learning Turkish as a foreign language.

From educational point of view, country studies is first of all a subject which includes topically-selected and arranged in one information set cultural, economic, socio-political, historical, geographical and other knowledge, which is typical of a particular nation, connected with the content and form of communication of native speakers. All thematically-selected information is implemented within the course of country studies in educational process. Including this information in the syllabus, educational and methodological complexes, learning guides, teachers primarily set a goal to foster the educational aspect of teaching, the development of common cultural competencies which are related to meeting communicative needs of students through the target language.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1. Research objectives

The objectives of the given research are:

- 1) To deal with the questions of formation of common cultural competencies in country study classes in the process of teaching Turkish as a foreign language;
- 2) To identify methodological and thematic basis of the course and types of classroom activities.

### 2.2. Theoretical and empirical methods

To examine the hypothesis we used a variety of complementary methods. They are:

- theoretical methods including the analysis of the theoretical literature devoted to the research problem; analysis, synthesis;
- classification including logical grouping of methodological data and processes based on a common feature;
- generalization.

### 2.3. Body of Data

The body of data is based on theoretical and methodological works on teaching foreign languages by Shchukin (1990), Tomakhin (1996), learning guides on country studies by Khabibullina (2014), Shenkal (2008) and others.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. The content and place of country studies as an academic subject in the process of teaching Turkish

Currently, within teaching a foreign language, Turkish in particular, country studies represents one of the aspects of its methodology whose research object is tools of acquainting language learners with an absolutely novel set of diverse information and data about the country by means of this language. Thus, alongside with studying the culture, history and geography of the country, language learners develop their linguistic knowledge and skills (expand lexical stock, improve skills of translation activity, ability to understand and deal with phraseological units and set expressions) (Furmanova, 1993).

Speaking of the content of the course syllabus of “Country studies”, its teaching and instructional material we should point out the following features. The syllabus of the academic subject “Country studies” for students majoring in languages and literatures of Asian and African countries (Turkey) within Oriental and African studies, contains themes such as geographical features, culture, socio-political and economic life of Turkey. One of the basic textbooks “Second Target Language Country Studies — Turkish” (Shenkal, 2008) includes essential facts about the geography, culture, policy, economy and cultural life of Turkey provided in Russian and Turkish languages. Additionally, it is supplemented with lexical and grammatical notes to texts in Turkish, various questions and tasks for checking students’ comprehension.

The learning guide by Khabibullina “Turkish language. Country studies” (Khabibullina, 2014) consists of four thematic parts which involve a number of texts related to the culture, history and geographical location of Turkey. Part one under the title “The Republic of Turkey: Cities and Historical Places” reminds a guide about the cities and sights of the country. There are texts describing the capital cities of Turkey, Istanbul and Ankara, historical places and sights and other interesting cities. Part two “History and Culture of the Republic of Turkey” contains texts about the traditions and lifestyle, culture and customs of the Turkish people, about its music and theater. This part acquaints students with historical Orkhon and Yenisey monuments, the art of paper marbling on water surface Ebru, traditional theater and its heroes Karagoz and Hacivat, the art of meddah, music and others. In part three “Prominent People of

Turkey” there are texts about famous people of Turkey who lived at various times and eras. Students get to know about personages from ancient history like Hodja Nasreddin, Mevlânâ or modern prominent figures like Oktay Sinanoğlu and Sezen Aksu as well as read about the characters of historical television series “Muhteşem Yüzyıl”. The fourth and final part comprises extracts from literary works of Turkish authors devoted to Turkey. Each part of the guide is supplemented with lexical notes, vocabulary exercises aimed at developing communication skills of students, visual aids like photos and various illustrations (Khabibullina E., 2015). After having covered most of the texts, students are offered to do various creative projects (E.K.Khabibullina, 2016).

While organizing the course syllabus of country studies, teaching guides and training complexes it is necessary to follow the methodological principles that make up their basis. Analyzing the above mentioned syllabi, teaching and methodological complexes on country studies, we tried to figure out how relevantly the principles were used.

The first principle is connected with how fully the social role of the language is revealed. It should be noted that selecting the themes and texts in the learning guide “The Turkish Language. Country Studies” we have made an effort to avoid incomprehensible complicated information on the geography and economy of Turkey and others. Instead, short and quite interesting texts about the most famous places, persons, traditions, literary pieces about Turkey were selected. Texts offered in the guide are free from difficult terms and rich in colloquial phrases. Lexical notes given after texts promote the accumulation of lexical information. So do vocabulary exercises, creative tasks and projects.

The second principle suggests learning a foreign language as a process of acculturation. Hence, it is aimed at introducing to students the values in the Turkish national culture. There are two relevant methods to achieve it: either running a small introduction lecture in Turkish before studying the new theme or doing an individual or team project on a topic which students could present based on independently compiled information. At this stage it is important to trace how students obtain reliable and sufficient information about the country, its history, culture, sights, prominent people and others.

It should be kept in mind that while teaching country studies we must promote an absolutely positive attitude towards Turkey among students who learn Turkish. According to this principle, we carefully selected texts about most known and loved by tourists and students sights of Turkey (sights of Istanbul, mosques, palaces, cities), texts about the Turkish traditional puppet theater, traditional art forms (texts about Ebru, engravings, Turkish carpets),

music, dancing, famous people of Turkey of all times (HodjaNasreddin, SezenAksu) and others.

Another principle is the selection of the sufficient body of information that has to be subsequently used in organizing the teaching process or designing educational and instructional guides. The teaching material mainly consists of texts in Turkish. It is obligatory that the texts should contain pieces of conversation that usually take place in real speech communication in the Turkish society, in the Turkish environment. They must reflect modern reality of social interaction of Turkish people. Thus, standard speech patterns regularly repeated in everyday communication ought to be included in the texts. Involvement of such texts along with additional illustrations allows the implementation of such principles as communicative approach, visualization, novelty and practical use.

So, last of the principles considered in the given research is connected with specifics of the academic subject “Country Studies”. In country studies classes, students get to know about the culture, history, geography of a country and simultaneously acquaint with its reality through the language they are learning. Language is a so-called guide, an essential component in comprehending all the information about the target language speaking country.

#### **4. DISCUSSIONS**

The issues of formation of common cultural competencies in country studies classes within the framework of teaching Turkish as a foreign language are almost not studied. Different aspects of formation of common cultural competencies have been widely investigated in relation to other foreign languages (Volkova, 2016; Alikberova&Mukhametzianov, 2016). Practical material and methodological instructions are described thoroughly in learning guides on country studies (Shenkal, 2008; Khabibullina, 2014). However, it should be noted that currently there is almost no research work devoted to instructional and thematic content of the course syllabus of “Country Studies (Turkey)” and that would suggest activities for promoting the development of cultural competencies in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. In the paper, based on theoretical aspects of abovementioned researches, an attempt was made to study the issues of formation of common cultural competencies in country studies classes within the framework of teaching Turkish as a foreign language.

#### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Summing up the results, we can say that while teaching a foreign language, particularly Turkish, classes of country studies facilitate to study simultaneously the culture, history,

ethnology of the Turkish people, which in its turn contributes to strengthening the motivation of students to communicate, broadens their cultural horizons and encourages teachers to diversify training methods and classroom activities. Introduction and observance of methodological bases and principles of teaching Turkish in country studies classes will definitely lead to the increase of motivation and enthusiastic work of students both in class and while working independently that will eventually encourage the need to obtain theoretical knowledge and master practical communication skills. In conclusion, it can be said that teaching Turkish in relation to country studies enables to foster students' knowledge of Turkey, various areas of life of the Turkish society which appear to be the source for speaking and thinking activity of students.

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