

Problems related to the age of learners in teaching a foreign language.

Urgench State University

Faculty of foreign languages

English language and literature department

2nd year master student Akhmedova Kamola

Abstract: The following article deals with the problems germane to the age of learners of a foreign language. It mainly discusses the causes of such problems and offers some approaches to tackle them efficiently.

Key words: cross-cultural misconceptions, sociolinguistics, language acquisition process, lexical comprehension, neologism.

Аннотация: В следующей статье рассматриваются проблемы, связанные с возрастом учащихся иностранного языка. В основном обсуждаются причины таких проблем и предлагаются некоторые подходы к их эффективному решению.

Ключевые слова: межкультурные неправильные представления, социолингвистика, процесс изучения языка, лексическое осмысление, неологизм.

With the introduction of a new language a number of social and cultural influences can be noticed in the host language. Various trends begin to appear in this language. In such a case a wide range of cross-cultural issues are not an exception to occurrence. Different aspects of such problems are also prone to appear. These misconceptions can be observed in the social life of locals as well as in the communication process with foreigners. For instance, in our country Uzbekistan, we have a lot of dialects and a foreign language may have its different forms in each dialect as people understand or pronounce a foreign word coming from their dialects. Possibly it is not a horrible mistake, however a number of misconceptions may appear as a result of such a situation such as wrong pronunciation or intonation and even incorrect use of stress.

The next important fact to mention is that in particular the younger section of the population tend to encounter such problems of cross-cultural communication. Due to the fact that they are studying at school or college where foreign languages are taught comprehensively resulting in more significant impact on them than other age groups. At the moment the most obvious influences on the speech of youngsters are believed to be the World Wide Web. This problem relates

to the youth of nearly all countries. That is the reason why current generation is regarded as ‘net generation’ and their speech ‘web speech’¹. Worthy to mention, this situation impinges on the memory negatively and weakens the sense of responsibility in the youth. Nowadays the usage of cell phones by youngsters has increased 70 %².

As a consequence of sociolinguistic influence the grammar, semantics, phonetics of the language may also face to some subtle changes. Since the language acquisition process of the child starts from infancy, from this period child’s speech begins to shape under the influence of the surroundings. As some linguists state, “Within the first 12-18 months semantic roles are expressed in one word speech including agent, object, location, possession, nonexistence and denial. Words are understood outside of routine games but the child still needs contextual support for lexical comprehension”³, namely, every situation is important in the childhood in order to form the speech correctly. As can be seen sociolinguistic problems may develop from an early period of life.

There are two ways of learning a foreign language one of which is that the opportunity of the learner to grasp a new language different from his mother tongue by the conversations with the native speakers of that foreign language or the second alternative which is “artificial environment” – during the lessons of foreign language. Naturally more cross-cultural problems are supposed to occur in the second situation. Owing to the fact that, during the whole lesson only one person that is the foreign language teacher stands in front of the learners as a member of the foreign language, as a result, learners listen to the same limited monotonous speech of just one person while they are learning the language. Teacher uses standard language materials and as an aftermath student acquire mono pronunciation and lexis. That is why there are many effects on their speech.

It is common knowledge that, foreign films or songs, some phrases, neologisms are of great interest to youngsters despite the fact that they are new or unknown to them. That is the result of child’s curiosity about the novelties of the world. It is natural for them to make lexical or phonetic mistakes while using these new phrases which have not been fully understood by them. In order to avert such unfavorable processes the influences on the child’s speech should be carefully examined and analyzed.

¹ Thurlow, C. (2001). Talking about my communication: Communication awareness in early adolescence. *Language Awareness*, 10 (2&3), 213 –231.

² Стекольников Алексей. “Алые пвруса” ns.portal.ru. 14.04.2012. “Влияние стового телефона на подростков”.

³ Brandone, Amanda, Salkind, Sara, and Golinkoff, Roberta, "Language Development" (n.d.): 499–514

As aforementioned, most cross-cultural misconceptions tend to happen in the communication process with a foreigner. One reason for this situation may be a number of existing versions of one language, and another may be the different way of using the words, idioms in different parts of the world. Teenagers do not grasp them in detail and know only the official form of the language. As we know social life's effect on children is higher than other sections of the population.

One approach to solve this problem effectively to some extent can be to teach learners not just the formal version of a foreign language but with the informal forms of the language learners ought to be acquainted as well. Only in this case they may not use foreign words or idioms in foreign movies or songs not knowing their original meaning.

Another most complicated problem in the process of teaching a foreign language is the fact that teaching of younger students requires different methodological approach than teaching elders. In this situation the main assistant source is commonly believed to be a game⁴.

By definition of M. F. Stronin "Game – this type of activity in terms of situations, aimed at recreating and assimilation of social experience, which develops and enhances self-behaviour"⁵.

Games can also be referred as a means of development of a younger language learner's cognitive activity. Many popular methodology manuals authors have argued that games are not just time-filling activities but have a huge educational benefit. W. R. Lee states that most language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about the usage of correct grammatical forms.

Owing to game methods learners may overcome the language barrier with remarkable ease, feel more relaxed in the classroom, avoid tension, fear and embarrassment as possible. Applying the lessons based on game technology is supposed to be an active instructor assistant by many. Its primary function – the organization and stimulation of the educational process of teaching a foreign language. In this case student becomes the main acting figure. The skills obtained in the course of lessons based on games can be utilised in everyday life, for example, while establishing social bonds, in the process of oral and written communication with native speakers and when setting up intercultural contacts within a relatively shorter period of time.

⁴ Konyshva A.V. The game methods in teaching foreign languages, Minsk: TetraSistems.

⁵ Elkonin D.B. Psychology of the game, Moscow: Publ. Center for Humanities VLADOS.

In studies concerned with the influence of age on foreign language learning, it is the initial age of learning at school that is taken to be the crucial variable, following a presumed parallelism between the two settings. But this point in time signals, as we saw above, the beginning of only insignificant exposure . Accordingly, it may be argued that in a foreign language learning setting the whole age range over which learning takes place should be taken into account because it may have more influence on the process and the final outcome than the initial age when the corresponding amount of exposure (and learning) is minimal. In sum, it can be claimed that the initial point of learning cannot play the same role in one and the other context, and that this is another important difference concerning age effects in a foreign language learning setting and in a naturalistic language learning setting ⁶.

A number of problems can be observed during the foreign language lesson and the easily noticeable ones in particular relates to the age of learners. To solve this kind of issue classroom should be task-oriented, socially and cyculturally informative which makes students all the time awake and interested.

⁶ Muñoz C. (2006a). The effects of age on foreign language learning: The BAF Project. In C. Muñoz (ed.).

References:

1. Thurlow, C. (2001). Talking about my communication: Communication awareness in early adolescence. *Language Awareness*, 10 (2&3), 213 –231.
2. Стекольников Алексей. “Алые пвруса” ns.portal.ru. 14.04.2012. “Влияние стового телефона на подростков”.
3. Brandone, Amanda, Salkind, Sara, and Golinkoff, Roberta, "Language Development" (n.d.): 499–514.
4. Konysheva A.V. The game methods in teaching foreign languages, Minsk: TetraSystems.
5. Elkonin D.B. Psychology of the game, Moscow: Publ. Center for Humanities VLADOS.
6. Muñoz C. (2006a). The effects of age on foreign language learning: The BAF Project. In C. Muñoz (ed.).