Problems faced by second language learners in Uzbekistan when acquiring sociolinguistic competence

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Abstract

This article deals with describing of the conception of sociolinguistic competence and its importance. It describes the term itself and tries to observe problems when second language learners acquire that competence. The lack of sociolinguistic competence is causing some serious problems in language learning and this article finds several relevant solutions to those problems. Also, there is given a survey about the identifying the main problems in foreign language learning among 11 English language learners.

Key words: sociolinguistics, sociocultural competence, culture, discourse.

Introduction

Today, learning a second language is becoming very common among many Uzbek youngsters. However, they are facing some problems in that process due to lack of sociolinguistic competence. Many learners in Uzbekistan do not even know what is sociolinguistic competence itself. Before starting to speak about the difficulties in the process of acquiring a competence, we must answer to that question?

What's sociolinguistic competence? "We define the notion of sociolinguistic competence as the capacity to recognize and produce socially appropriate speech in context". (Lyster, 1994: 263)

In short, sociolinguistic competence is a language in society. Sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of sociocultural rules of language and discourse. This competence is based on the understanding of contexts in which language is used. Sociolinguistic competence is the mastery of the cultural usage and discourse conventions that apply to many languages. Regarding cultural usage guidelines, the focus is on how suitable communication acts and speech sound in particular socio-cultural contexts. To be sociolinguistically competent, one must adapt their grammatical structures to the context of the communication. The formality of the setting and criteria like the participants' age, status, and sex are taken into consideration. These situational conditions may need different speech reactions when one travels to a different culture than they would in the local culture.

What kind of problems do learners face when learning a second language? Students encounter some problems when acquiring sociolinguistic competence in their native language. So getting familiar with this competence in second language can also be a great difficulty. First of all, second language learners try to learn a foreign language

in a short time and they do not consider about sociolinguistic rules of the language. They lack time and also opportunity. Second language teachers also try to teach a language in a short time. They use traditional methods in teaching a second language like only learning vocabularies with translations in the classroom rather than learning how to use that word in situations. The second language learners do not know how to use words, which they learned, in a social context. The first and foremost reason of difficulties in acquisition of sociolinguistic competence is the lack of teacher's methods and skills to teach a sociolinguistic competence. They do not use effective ways of teaching a foreign language to second language learners. Only learning vocabulary and grammar rules cannot be so effective to acquire sociolinguistic competence. The learners should be in a real situation or they should talk with native speakers.

An Uzbek student studying in the United States wants to express to his professor his concern for the professor's well-being, so after class he advises the professor to eat less fattening foods so that he will look more fit. Here the American listener again understands the literal meaning of the words, but the speaker's intention of showing friendliness by giving advice, a common strategy in his native country, is lost as the American listener interprets this action as an assault on his privacy and as an extremely rude comment.

The second reason is the lack of confidence. Learners are afraid of speaking in public or in front of people. This depends on the first reason. If they have no sociolinguistic competence, they will not be able to speak fluently. But they should take a risk and try to use words, that learned, in speech. Also, they should watch English movies and videos in order to acquire sociolinguistic competence.

King & Silver (1993) of studies written on the effect of immersion on sociolinguistic competence lead them to conclude "…that length of stay in a second language environment is beneficial for acquiring sociolinguistic competence but insufficient and time consuming" (King & Silver, 1993, p. 48,).

An obvious method of helping students attain this knowledge is to teach culture in the foreign language classroom. Moreover, teachers should create real situations or use pictures, videos to teach every word.

Methods

I conducted a survey among 11 Uzbek students who study at Bukhara State university in Foreign languages faculty in group 11-2ing-21. All of them are second year students. One is male, the others are female. All of the participants are between 19-20 ages. The level of one student is elementary, 4 of them are intermediate (have B2 certificate from IELTS), 4 of them are upper-intermediate and 2 of them are advanced students (have C1 certificate). They have different level of English. The survey is organized in order to see what problems they are facing while acquiring sociolinguistic competence. Firstly, I gave some questions to identify whether they know sociolinguistic competence. Here you can see results:

№	Questions	Yes	No
1	Have your teachers used pictures or videos to teach you new words?	2	9
2	Do you usually watch English movies to improve your language learning?	3	8
3	Have you learned language only with grammar and vocabulary?	11	0
4	Do your teachers at university teach you sociolinguistic competence?	4	7
5	Do you learn new words with their definition?	3	8

Question	Only drinking tea	Drinking tea and having something to eat
If a British person invites you to a tea party, what would you expect to have?	18%	82%

Discussion

When I handed a question paper to them, only 18% of them answered they know sociolinguistic competence according to the question. However, 82% of them do not acquire sociolinguistic competence. The next step was to identify the problems. Only 2 students answered that their teacher used pictures and videos to teach sociolinguistic competence and 3 students are trying to enhance their sociolinguistic competence by watching videos, movies. All students learned the language with grammar and structure, they do not try to enhance it with definitions and sentences. Also they are not acquiring that competence too. Besides that, 4

students said that all of their teachers do not teach students how to improve their competences. However, some students are trying to acquire sociolinguistic competence and developing it.

Conclusion

To conclude, many Uzbek students at Bukhara State university don't know about sociolinguistic competence and that's why their level of English is lower. That is causing several problems such as not understanding English variations and native speakers. They lack confidence and also time to acquire sociolinguistic competence. First of all, teachers should teach learners with animated videos and short stories. Students should be taught the cultural usage of each word that they are learning. They should not only teach words with their translations but also with definitions and sentences. Learners should be taught which word is used in several situations. That will help them to increase their ability of understanding. Furthermore, they should speak with native speakers too. There should be a real English atmosphere for students to communicate. It is obvious from the survey that many Uzbek students are afraid of taking risks. This is also one of the problems that lack of sociolinguistic competence is causing.

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