

Ketevan Gochitashvili

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

Second / foreign language teachers' challenges and the ways of solutions

ABSTRACT

The article presents the main challenges, which second language teachers have to overcome to perfect language teaching process and enrich new methods and approaches. The opinions expressed in the article are based on theoretical study and on my professional experience.

Challenges faced by foreign language teachers depend on:

- the sociocultural and political context of the language training;
- what is students' composition (age, social and economic status);
- students' mood and willingness to study the language, the target language status;
- if the language, taught by the teacher is his/her native language or not;
- in general, what are educational and, in particular, linguistic education traditions in a particular region.

In our article, we will try to show a few, in our opinion, significant challenges, that formally appear in almost all cases of teaching a second language and mark the required skills and knowledge of a second language teachers to deal with the problems.

• **Diversity of the audience** is one of the key challenges especially (but not only) in adult learners. The scientific literature indicates the following: the cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic and academic diversity, which is typical in today's student population, requires foreign language teacher to work with students, whose needs, educational experiences and native language skills are very different from those of students they have typically taught. (Valdes, 1995; p. 299-328). In addition, of course, the

factors, that have traditionally existed about the audience, and which are familiar to practicing teachers still remain. In our view, these factors might be considered as the students' emotional diversity, intellectual differences, motivation, different quality and access to the target language, differences in the technological skills and, of course, in advance knowledge.

In my opinion, this is one of the most difficult, but at a certain level predictable problem to overcome. For solving the

problems a teacher should know pedagogical and psychological theories on foreign language teaching and, in our opinion, the most important thing is that at the beginning of a career, at an early stage a student should be allowed to conduct a lesson in a different educational environment and conditions that gives the best example of experience. If it is not possible, because of the curriculum, it will be good to give students at an early stage the opportunity to watch foreign language teaching process record and discuss in this regard. As for practicing teachers, we think the best way is sharing experience and analysis of colleagues' and own working process, so-called "scientist-practitioner approach" (Berninger, Dun, Lin, Shimada, 2004; p. 500-508).

• **"Dealing with sensitive issues"**. Figuratively speaking, a foreign language teacher is in the epicenter of cultural gathering. The target culture in the context of a second language study is one of the decisive factors of second language acquisition. It is known that "culture and communication are inseparable, because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to decide how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages might or might not be sent, noticed or

interpreted. Culture is the foundation of communication." (Samovar, Porter, Jain, 1981; p. 5)

Language learning and specifics of teaching involves a lot of issues for mastering, which are different from the norms and beliefs prevailing in the student's culture. One of the most important challenges second / foreign language teachers have to overcome is to deliver it thoroughly and delicately. This problem is particularly acute when it concerns linguistic / ethnic minorities or immigrants and when cultural inversion occurs, i.e resistance process to the dominant culture for the integration process or bicultural ambivalence, the double sense, reflected in their native culture by their sense of shame and hostile, negative attitude towards other cultures.

In general, expressing respect, recognition and appreciation to other countries and cultures (including the target culture) can be considered as the basis for an adequate response to this challenge. It is considered effective introducing the target culture films, properly selected folklore, literary and publicist works (or their fragments) and other texts (cooking recipes, songs with lyrics..) focus on cultural issues to get information about it from the authentic sources and develop tolerance towards the new culture.

- **Thematic language (themes principle) teaching.** Real knowledge of the language is not only knowledge of its vocabulary and grammatical structures, or switching smoothly from one language code to another. Language knowledge means the ability to use it in real communicative situations. Therefore, we need knowledge of the issues and themes that learners have to meet in real-life communication situations or will have them in the future. In addition, a foreign language teaching strong tradition should be taken into consideration that not only lexical-phraseological units, but also the rules of grammar and structures are taught with a specific topic. The list of issues is almost endless, but the teacher will be required to know and teach learners such subjects as: the nation (nations) history, geography, politics, social issues, health care, banking and financial sector, legal systems and, also, high level knowledge of their vocabulary is required.

- One of the most important challenges that foreign language teachers face is **an instruction (teaching) language**. Should a teacher use the student's first language (although, according to a class composition, it may be either a learner's first language or any language, which both students and teachers speak) to teach a foreign language? For decades important discussions about this issue (more accurately, the usage of first

language) have been going on in the scientific community. It is known Stephen Krashen's point of view that second language (in its broadest sense) is taught mainly in the same way as people study their first language. This idea has been the basis for the opinion that using the first language in teaching the second language is not recommended. (Tang, 2007, pp. 36-43)

According to the second approach, „the use of L1 in the L2 classroom by both teachers and students can be beneficial in the language learning process. Once an appropriate balance is achieved, the use of L1 will enhance an L2 classroom.”

(Morahan, http://www.labschool.pdx.edu/PD_Mini_Modules/images/8/81/Morahan_L2inL1class.pdf)

Naturally, in this case a teacher is required to know the target language as well as the instruction language and if necessary to modify the instruction language as a teacher language (language that teachers use in the teaching process and is considered as the simplified speech for students). If the language is too childish or different from natural producing of target language it may be harmful for learners. Thus, teachers are required to decide:

- when and how much should be used the language of instruction different from the target language.

- to find the exact balance in producing and using "language teacher".

Teaching experience and flair are important, but they are insufficient and unreliable factors for solving this task. From my teaching experience, to make a decision using the language "works well", there are following factors:

- asking various questions (oral and written) for clarification if the students understand the conversation or what they read or hear in the language of learning.
- students form a short summary from what is said/read/ heard in learning language, until the teacher makes a decision.
- Get a feedback from the students, and then select the proper linguistic repertoire.

It should be noted that in this regard challenges are much more serious and goes beyond the issue to use or not to use the first language. The point is that students in many foreign language courses can not speak any language but their native one (for example, people who immigrated to economically developed countries, national minorities, who have got monolingual education in their native language). In such case a teacher faces two important challenges:

1. Students do not have any experience of learning a new language.
2. And the second - explaining complex and abstract ideas when the exclusive use of the first language (including paintings, sound imitation or pantomime) is almost impossible.

Knowing methods of teaching foreign language and diversity of approaches and ability of selecting an adequate method to the specific theme is another challenge.

Stephen Noushen, a recognized researcher in second language teaching, believes that there is no best method of learning language. "Is there a best method for learning a language? Unfortunately, the answer is no. Language learning can occur through all kinds of methods. What is most important is that good principles of learning are applied... These all have their supporters and attackers. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses and there is no research that shows the superiority of one method over another. It is fine to follow a particular method although it is not necessary. (Noushen, http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/publications/paul-nation/foreign-language_1125.pdf)

We totally agree with Muriel Saville-Troike's opinion about combining of methods, that she suggests in her fundamental work "Introducing Second Language Acquisition": "The array of social circumstances and individual learner factors which we have explored indeed suggests that there can be no one "best" method that will fit all, and a combination of different methods is undoubtedly the wisest approach". (Saville-Troike, 2012, 33. 188).

Using of information technologies in the teaching process. A computer plays more and more important role in second/foreign language education. In general, language education (and, also, in nearly all aspects of life) can't do without using the global trend of information technologies. Specialists point to the positive results of its application. These are the most tangible services and accessible to almost unlimited resources, easy sharing of experiences and cooperation. (Sierra; <http://www.hltnmag.co.uk/jun09/sart06.htm>). In addition, we believe, it is no less important for students to bring closer learning-teaching process to natural and convenient environment. Considering that the overwhelming majority of learners represent further generation after "digital revolution", which means that electronic resources are part of daily life, it is completely obvious the importance to enrich the course by

information-technologies, because it allows more comfortable environment.

(K.Gochitashvili

http://multilinguaeducation.org/storage/uploads/articles_contents/150122053812.pdf).

General recommendations:

The article presented the major problem, which teachers have to deal with and our opinions about their elimination. At the end of the article we offer some general recommendations that will make easier for language learners difficult and labor-intensive process, and will give teachers the opportunity to create most comfort for their students and their activities will become effective.

- Establishing close links between theory and practice will give efficient operation of the educational process. On the one hand, teachers should be able to transfer the theory into practice, on the other hand, to observe own practice, research own experiences and implement obtained results in the teaching process.
- Teaching language can not be reduced to "readily available" level for students. Language should be taught in the context and not only study issues should be changed according to students' needs, but the methods and approaches.

- Teachers should not depend only on the available resources. They should be ready to create materials taking into consideration specific needs.
- Teaching language is a dynamic field. University education can not cover all the needs of practicing language teachers. Professional development (including self-development) should be an integral part of life in teacher's career. We believe that continuous education is one of the most effective solution.

To respond to the challenges language teachers are required to know not only the

subject, psychology and pedagogy foundations, but have also some personal qualities, if they exist in this case language courses are much more productive and efficient. These include, above all, flexibility, creativity and openness. Teachers do not have to look like a "technician", (Lawes, 2003; pp.22-28), whose duty is only transmission of information or knowledge. A teacher must be a person who plans training process from beginning to end, and takes responsibility for the decisions and success of the process.

REFERENCES:

- Berninger, Dunn, Lin, Shimada, 2004 - Berninger, V.W., Dunn, A., Lin, S-J. C., & Shimada, S. (2004). School-evolution: scientist-practitioner educators creating optimal learning environments for all students. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 37(6), 2004, 500-508
- Gochitashvili, 2013 - Ketevan Gochitashvili, The role of IT technologies in the process of foreign/second language education: *International Journal of Multilingual Education*; 2013, #2; pp. 18-43. http://www.multilingualeducation.org/storage/uploads/articles_contents/150117064359.pdf
- Lawes, 2003 - Lawes, S., What, when, how and why? Theory and foreign language teaching. *Language Learning Journal*, Special Edition, 28, pp. 2013, 22-28.
- Samovar, Larry, Porter, Nemi, 1981 - Samovar Larry A., Porter Richard E, & Jain Nemi C; *Understanding intercultural communication*, WadsworthPub. Co. (Belmont, Calif. 1981, p. 5.
- Saville-Troike, 2012 - Muriel Saville-Troike 2012, *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*, 2012, p. 188.
- Sierra, 2009 - Patricia Sierra, *Humanizing Language Teaching Magazine for Teachers and Teacher Trainers*; <http://www.hltnmag.co.uk/jun09/sart06.htm>.
- Tang, 2002 - Tang, J. (2002). Using L1 in the English classroom. *EnglishTeachingForum*, 40(1),36-43.
- Valdés, 1995 - Valdés, G. (1995). The teaching of minority languages as academic subjects: Pedagogical and theoretical challenges *The Modern Language Journal*, 79, 299-328. http://multilingualeducation.org/storage/uploads/articles_contents/150122053812.pdf. http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/publications/paul-nation/foreign-language_1125.pdf http://www.labschool.pdx.edu/PD_Mini_Modules/images/8/81/MorahanL2inL1class.pdf