

Some Issues of Teaching Georgian as a Foreign Language

Ketevan SIKHARULIDZE *

Abstract

Formation of new approaches in the methodology of foreign language teaching is encouraged by the experience accumulated throughout years in the exposed field. Prevailing interactive methods approve of the necessity of their implementation during language teaching/learning process. They also activate learner's psychological and mental recourses and enable him/her to acquire the language on the communicative level. The presentation is based on the practical results of teaching Georgian as a foreign language at International Black Sea University.

Foreign language teaching covers certain stages and each level peculiarity is determined by its academic objective.

The presentation emphasizes the phonetic, lexical and grammatical difficulties of teaching Georgian as foreign language in multicultural environment and offers the means of overcoming those difficulties.

Key Words: Methodology; Foreign Language Teaching; Multicultural Environment.

Some issues of teaching Georgian as a foreign language

Georgia is a small country. Respectively, Georgian is not an international language and the area of its spread is bounded within its own territory. Supposedly, the issues and methodology of Georgian as a foreign language were not researched and elaborated on the appropriate scientific level. Georgian language was included in the curriculum of nonnative students living in Georgia, but it was mainly used to process a rather formal character. Textbooks were compiled based on out-of-date methods (samples of ancient Georgian literature, prose pieces considerably difficult for students to perceive, Georgian grammar system, etc), so such teaching wouldn't lead to efficient results. The expansion of people's mobility in the contemporary world made contacts on the language level more active. The recent economic situation existed in Georgia increased the interest of foreign businessmen towards the country, Georgian language and confronted them with the urgent need of acquiring the language. Particular inevitability to study Georgian language belongs to the foreigners working in Georgia for both every-day and professional communication requirements in the spheres of international cooperation, enterprise, economy and trade. But the great majority of groups learning Georgian language are students. Currently 1600 foreign students are being educated in Georgia, and the number will definitely increase in the future. Consequently, teaching Georgian as a foreign language is actively involved in the Georgian education system and turns into a category of issues concerning new trends in higher education.

The methodology of teaching languages is constantly being developed and altered, demanding different approaches towards the academic content organization and determining the particular role of a teacher. Formation and implementation of new ways in the methodology of foreign language teaching are prompted by the experience gathered in the field throughout many years. Foreign language teaching current practice accepts a communicative approach focused on learning the language as the means of real-life interaction essential for learners. The main goal of communicative teaching is the formation of communicative components in learners enabling them to satisfy basic life requirements. Teaching Georgian should also follow the general mainframe determined by contemporary foreign language teaching methodology, considering certain corrections, specificity of the learned language and peculiarities of the society possessing the given language.

Radical changes have been pushed forward in teaching Georgian as a foreign language according to the modern demands and trends and these alterations are reflected in textbooks and methodological implications issued in recent years, becoming a great theoretical and practical

* Prof. Dr., International Black Sea University, Georgia

guidebooks for teachers to obtain useful tips from. Most of them were planned and designed within joined projects of Georgian ministry of Education and Sciences and Euro Council. "Georgian Language Communicative Grammar" by N. Sharashenidze was published in 2007; Georgian Language textbook "Tavtavi (Wheat-ear)" (1-3 levels) for non-georgian schools was prepared in 2005-2007. The book issued in Tbilisi 2006 called "Reference Level Description for the Georgian Language" will contribute a lot in the future to the process of compiling and publishing textbooks and tests. The book is also likely to become the background for the programs of different level groups or concrete purposeful courses. "Reference Level Description for the Georgian Language" is included in the sphere of linguistic-didactic description of contemporary European languages. Its description according to the parameters acknowledged by Euro Union guarantees its integration in the international education and certification system and provides its consideration in the range of common European language unity. All these enable us to conclude that the question of teaching Georgian as a second/foreign language and solving the problems connected to it have become rather urgent.

In the contemporary language teaching approach the shift is transferred to the communicative function of the language. The main attention here is paid to the language as to the means of interaction and not as the description of the system common to the old methodology. In communicative grammar each category is discussed according to its urgency and significance to express different forms of communication. The basic concern of communicative grammar is the way to build up communication and language means needed to express certain thoughts. Consequently, teaching/learning process is designed regarding the practical value of the language; implementing concrete language input in concrete oral speech situation. It doesn't mean that linguistic competence is ignored. Undoubtedly, communicative exercises (tasks are based on grammar regulations, but while using this method, grammar rules are involved in the teaching process gradually and naturally avoiding imposing on grammar rules and terminology. Grammar system of Georgian language radically diverse from Indo-European language is the number of Iberian-Caucasian language family possessing a lot of distinct consonants and palate sounds which is a great obstacle at the beginning level of teaching. These consonants cause particular difficulties to foreigners having problems in differentiating same range consonants at the beginning of studying. Distinct pronunciation is not the only problem. In some cases these consonants stand for different lexical meanings (yeli-xeli, Rru-yru, qari-kari, etc), so their knowledge and the right pronunciation matter much in the teaching/learning process. The communicative method alters the role of a teacher as well, who is not only the information provider, but also a supervisor managing students and helping them.

I would like to emphasize a couple of moments from the experience I got while teaching at International Black Sea University for 11 years.

Generally teaching a foreign language (and Georgian is among them) covers stages and this process and its each of its components are determined by the set desirable result (achievement). Georgian language is compulsory for every faculty Freshmen at our university, The word "compulsory" acquires a tint of obligation, but Georgian is the language of the state in which a foreign student lives for a minimum 4 years, and he/she needs it for the orientation in Georgian surrounding. You wouldn't disagree that it is a serious motivation to study and it stimulates a student. For those who have furthergoing aims, we offer a higher level of Georgian language as an elective course.

An interactive environment is essential for the implementation of communication method as it contributes to making psychological and mental resources of the learner more active and efficient. For this purpose we often use so called simulation technology-imitation of real situations in the classroom. It is rather important, that such situations are not only artificially designed in classes, but students are exposed to this reality outdoors as soon as they leave classrooms. Natural interactive space shared with peers helps students to overcome Georgian language difficulties and it is, of course, much more effective than all technical means.

One more, in my opinion, a significant factor needs to be underlined. As practical classes are prior in language teaching, teachers keep closer contacts with students (I mean dialogues, conversations on different topics) than the lecturers of those disciplines were theoretical issues outweigh. Language teachers acquire more possibilities of improvisation and this opportunity should be exploited purposefully. Of course the basic curriculum should be stuck to, but the role of improvisation is also crucial and huge (I mean introducing adequate emotions and lexical units; conversations on various topics; expression of more sensitiveness).

Language is one of the fundamentals of cultural phenomenon reflecting ethno-psychological, sophisticated picture and perception means of its possessors. Involving etymological issues, comparison of traditional elements in the multicultural environment has positive effects from the prospective of not only learning Georgian language, but also of revealing identity among youngsters. So, it is desirable for language teachers to have at least slight ideas about cultural values of the nation represented by students, as human relations, a human factor is a significant stimulating means.

References

1. Reference Level Description for the Georgian Language, Tbilisi, 2006.
2. N. Sharashenidze, Communicative Grammar of Georgian Language, 2007.
3. Z. bagashvili, M. Odzeli, Development of communicative competence (compiled within the framework of a joint project of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia), Tbilisi, 2006.