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## The Role and Values of Foreign Language Education in a Modern World

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Podstawy Edukacji 6, 297-305

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2013

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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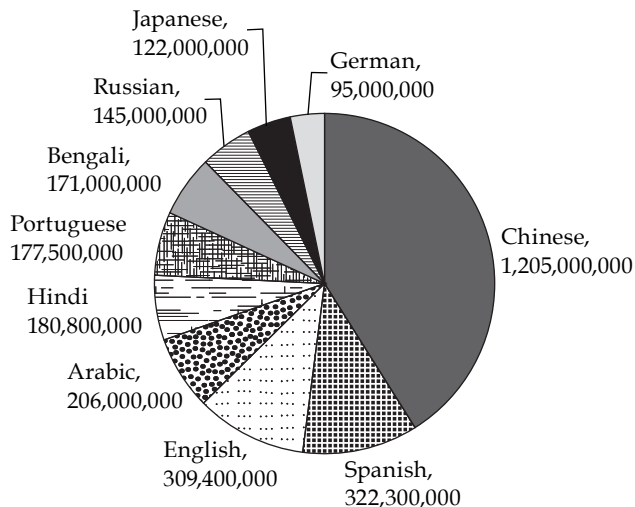
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## The Role and Values of Foreign Language Education in a Modern World

It won't sound new for all of us when I note that English is one of the most important and widely used languages; it has status as a world language ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language)). It is the third most common native language in the world, after Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. Approximately 310 million people speak English as their first language, which is illustrated by the following picture.

Image 1. Approximate number of native speakers by language around the world



Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language) (18.04.2013).

It should also be added that over 375 million use English a second language and more than 750 million as a foreign language ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language)).

Linguistics professor D. Crystal (2003, p. 69), honorary professor of Bangor University in Wales, Great Britain, calculated that non-native speakers of English now outnumber native speakers by a ratio of 3 to 1.

Keeping its title as the dominant language and even the required international language of communication, science, information technology, business, seafaring, aviation, entertainment, radio and diplomacy, it is more than obvious that for each and every citizen of the developed society it is essential to master English as a foreign language. The English language is a *de facto* standard in international business. A business that wants to be or become an international business has no other alternative, neither in writing nor in verbal.

Clearly, it is not only that by knowing English you pay tribute to the fashion but people with deep knowledge of any foreign language constitute the elite of modern society that faces the process of modern globalization.

The aim of this work is to show that to know a foreign language (in our case English) is not only a life necessity caused by its global significance but also it is of the utmost importance for educational process in general.

Being a foreign language teacher by profession, I started work as a University teacher for the Department of English Philology of Belarusian State University immediately after graduation in 2002. My professional responsibilities have included teaching English as a major and minor to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students, who learn English as their first and second foreign language and are trained to get qualifications of a linguist and English language teacher. Throughout my career I have been teaching different aspects of the language: phonetics, grammar, conversation practice, text analysis, listening, reading.

In fact, this article is the result of 11 years of teaching practice.

It is clear that being a foreign language teacher, one never stops perfecting themselves in it. The question of a competent foreign language teacher has been raised in our previous work, where it suggests several guidelines for teachers in assisting students' development of their foreign language communicative skills (Y. Sakalova, 2012, p. 254).

But there is one more important point to consider. That is how foreign language education is connected with pedagogy and how the main principles of pedagogic process are fulfilled through this process.

It is evident that when one knows a foreign language they break the limits, broaden their outlooks, which makes for the harmonious development of personality. Knowledge of foreign languages contributes to the development of intellectual and cognitive processes, which is a primary aim of pedagogic process. It can be explained by the fact that during foreign language acquisi-

tion a person has to operate with another language system, different syntactic constructions and new grammar patterns develop analytical skills, the necessity to remember new lexical units trains memory, working with foreign language texts requires to be logical, quick-witted (quick in perception and understanding, mentally alert) and attentive. Remaining main participants of the pedagogic process, learners acquire communication and interaction skills during team-work with groupmates, in discussions they learn to express their ideas and defend them, respect other's points of view, overcome fear of public-speaking, hereby develop their personal qualities and remove psychological barriers.

Teaching a foreign language we shouldn't forget that our aim is not only to make learners speak this language with the given communicative purpose (Y. Sakalova, 2012, p. 248). We should look on our task more broadly. We teach communication, culture, moral principles, esthetical values. Deep knowledge of a foreign language enables its learners to read texts in the original, thus, contributes to the adequate perception of other cultures and is helpful for increasing mutual understanding between people from different ethnic groups (Y. Sakalova, 2012, p. 252-253).

Teaching a foreign language implies that there is always an interaction between a learner and a teacher, a feedback between them, that helps optimize pedagogic process.

The question arises in 'what is the pedagogic value of public reviews and critiques'?

Constructive criticism and feedback are valuable pedagogic tools to help students in a variety of ways: to broaden their perspectives, to deepen their understanding, to improve the quality of their work, to motivate reflection on their learning process, etc. Criticism and feedback can be delivered privately, e.g., comments on papers, grades on exams, and in public settings, i.e. in class, during presentations and discussions.

I, as a foreign language teacher, consider it imperative to the process of foreign language acquisition to use constructive criticism and, if performed effectively, it is a productive educational activity. For example, in my work I often face the problem that students mumble, that is, say something quietly in a very unclear way that makes it difficult for me and others understand what has been said. It is obvious that a teacher should react somehow to this. So, instead of destructive 'You mumbled' it's more preferable to say 'Speak a little louder so the people in the back can hear you too'.

Some more examples of constructive criticism can be found in the table 1.

Table 1. Examples of destructive and constructive criticism

Destructive criticism	Constructive criticism
You are indistinct!	You are being trained to get a profession of a philologist, so you should have a very good clear pronunciation!
You spoke too fast!	Try slowing down a bit for everybody to keep up with you!
Your speech was too short!	I would have liked to hear more!
You are late again!	I hope next time you will come on time!
Your pronunciation wasn't very good!	You need more practice with these words!

Source: own elaboration.

Naturally, we do not want embarrassment or strictly personal criticism used as pedagogic tools that can destroy someone's reputation and self-esteem, constructive criticism addresses an area that needs improving and doesn't speak to the person's self. Students need to analyze where they have gone wrong, and how they can improve.

One more pedagogic value that is fulfilled through foreign language education is its communication value. Playing out dialogues, making scenes, participating in discussions people learn communication and become more sociable and, thus, more successful in life. Famous American scholar D. Carnegie (1981) pointed out that one's promotion 80% depends on their abilities to communicate with other people, and only 20% is left for other factors (education, work-experience, etc.).

It is worth noting that to know a foreign language is also important for one's self-realization, which is one of the main values of pedagogic process. The sense of achieving the full development of one's abilities and talents lets a person feel happy and needed, which can help build a flourishing society.

In addition, I want to demonstrate how through teaching different aspects of the language all the above-mentioned principles and values of pedagogic process are realized. As objects of the research I have chosen teaching grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, reading and translation.

## Teaching grammar

It is clear that grammar is the basis of the language and an important part of communicative competence (Y. Sakalova, 2012, p. 250–251). To master grammar material, to develop stable and fluent grammar skills, it requires

brainwork from the side of a learner. For example, while learning the topic ‘Passive Voice’ one is asked to make transformations from Active to Passive:

- 1) the object of the active sentence becomes the subject in the passive sentence;
- 2) the active verb remains in the same tense, but changes into a passive form;
- 3) the subject of the active sentence becomes the agent, and is either introduced with the preposition by or omitted (J. Dooley, V. Evans, 2008, p. 87).

Table 2 shows some of the transformations.

Table 2. Changing from active into passive

Active Voice	Passive Voice
David asked for some help.	Some help was asked for by David.
They are always laughing at me.	I am always being laughed at.
Is Sue washing the car?	Is the car being washed by Sue?
Somebody has stolen a large amount of jewellery from the shop.	A large amount of jewellery has been stolen from the shop
They will employ a cleaner to clean their house.	They will have their house cleaned.

Source: own elaboration.

As can be seen from this table, this work requires understanding and stimulates the development of intellectual and cognitive processes. So, the aim of pedagogic process is achieved.

## Teaching vocabulary

Undoubtedly, that teaching a foreign language we teach how to speak that language (Y. Sakalova, 2012, p. 248–249) and to speak on the level, acceptable for communication, one needs a wide vocabulary. For someone to learn large amounts of vocabulary may come easy, for others it can be like a brain twister. Certainly, one can think over their own, effective methods of memorizing words and compiling a personal dictionary. Table 3 suggests one of the possible ways.

Table 3. How to remember words and compile a personal dictionary

Word	Spelling	Definition	Synonyms	Antonyms	Collocations
Frost (noun)	[frost]	a weather condition in which the temperature drops below 0°C	freezing, extremely cold	heat, hot weather	a sharp/hard/severe frost; to be covered with frost
To rain (verb)	[rein]	when it rains, water falls from the sky in drops	to drizzle, to shower, to pour	to shine (about the sun); to be cloudless (about the sky)	be raining cats and dogs (to be raining heavily); it never rains but it pours (bad things happen one after another)
Smart (adjective)	[sma:t]	well-dressed in fashionable and/or formal clothes; intelligent	clean, neat; fashionable; clever, bright	untidy, out-of-date, stupid, dull	the smart money (people who have expert knowledge of something)
Fast (adverb)	[fa:st]	moving or able to move at great speed	quickly	slowly	to be fast asleep (sleeping deeply)

Source: own elaboration.

To organize a personal dictionary in the suggested way it is required to be logical and teaches to systematize. So, one more aim of pedagogic process is achieved.

## Teaching phonetics

It is clear that to learn a foreign language is to master another sound system, vocal code, stress and intonation patterns, different from one's mother tongue. Corrupted articulation, indistinct and incomprehensible pronunciation prevent from normal communication. The way we speak, how correctly we put stress on words, how intelligible, distinct and clear we are for the interlocutor – all this can say a lot about our personalities, education, upbringing, profession, etc. Indeed, there is an art of speaking.

During foreign language classes, there is a lot of work on pronunciation, stress, intonation. Table 4 illustrates some of the phonetic tasks.

Table 4. Possible phonetic tasks

Tongue twisters	Rhymes	Pronunciation practice
Critical cricket critic.	Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. If Peter picked a peck of pickled peppers, where is the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?	was the view, was the peasant, as the children, was somebody, his small companion, was strange, etc.
A cup of coffee from a copper coffee pot.	Swan swam over the sea. Swim, swan, swim. Swan swam back again. Well swum, swan!	take the place, at that age, sat there, stood there, again the word, made the discovery, etc.
A big blue bucket of blue berries.	Betty Botter bought some butter. But, she said, the butter's bitter. If I put it in my batter, it will make my batter bitter.	sweet singing, standing stones, east side, that seemed, etc.

Source: own elaboration.

The wide variety of phonetic tasks helps foreign language learners feel more confident that they will be easily understood by the interlocutor. So, one of the fear of speaking aloud because of one's indistinct pronunciation is overcome. Another aim of pedagogic process is achieved.

## Teaching reading and translation

An important point of foreign language education is teaching reading of the authentic texts. Through reading different genres of literature in the original one is able to broaden their outlooks and perceive other cultures more adequately. So, it contributes to the harmonious development of personality.

Undoubtedly, that teaching a foreign language we don't teach an abstract subject, we teach culture (Y. Sakalova, 2012, p. 251-253). Culture can be compared to an iceberg.

Just as an iceberg has a visible section above the waterline, and a larger, invisible section below the line, so culture has some aspects that are observable and others that can only be suspected or imagined. Also like an iceberg, that part of culture that is visible is only as small part of a much bigger whole. And during our encounters with a different culture through reading and translating foreign language texts we often try to read through the lines, i.e.



make assumptions about values and beliefs (invisible elements of culture) and see how they are revealed in the language.

Not surprisingly, in foreign language acquisition reading and translation skills from mother tongue to a foreign language and vice versa should be formed properly.

Shifts from one language to another require quick-wittedness and full understanding.

Differences in semantic and grammatical structures of the languages, their stylistic and expressive nuances, word-order, author's implications, non-equivalent and culture-loaded words – a translator should keep all this in mind at a time.

So, this study has shown that through teaching different aspects of the foreign language (grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, reading and translation) the basic principles and values of pedagogic process are realized. The role of foreign language education in a modern world is enormous due to the tasks it fulfills.

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## Summary

The present article thoroughly discusses the problem of learning foreign languages in a modern world. Reasons are stated. The attention is also focused on how the main principles of pedagogic process are fulfilled through foreign language education and what values of pedagogic process should be maintained during foreign language teaching. In addition, it is demonstrated how through teaching different aspects of the language (grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, reading and translation) the principles and values of pedagogic process are realized. The material of the article is fully based on author's eleven-year teaching experience at the Department of English Philology of Belarusian State University.

## Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł omawia problem nauki języków obcych w nowoczesnym świecie. Zwraca uwagę na realizację głównych zasad procesu pedagogicznego w nauczaniu języków obcych oraz na wartości pedagogiczne, do jakich powinno się odnosić w nauczaniu języków obcych. Tekst ponadto charakteryzuje, jak przez nauczanie różnych aspektów języka (gramatyka, słownictwo, fonetyka, czytanie i tłumaczenie) realizowane są zasady i wartości procesu pedagogicznego. Artykuł powstał na podstawie jedenastoletnich doświadczeń autorki, która jest wykładowcą na Wydziale Filologii Angielskiej Białoruskiego Uniwersytetu Państwowego.