

CROSS-CULTURAL CONNECTION: AN EFFECTIVE METHOD OF TEACHING VIETNAMESE FOR LAOTIAN STUDENTS

KẾT NỐI GIAO THOA VĂN HÓA: PHƯƠNG PHÁP DẠY TIẾNG VIỆT HIỆU QUẢ CHO LƯU HỌC SINH LÀO

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ABSTRACT: *Recently, many provinces and universities in Laos have sent their staffs, lecturers, students to Quang Binh University (QBU) with the purpose for cultural exchanges in Southeast Asia. Those Laotian students come to QBU to study, and to do research. To make it easy for the students, the first thing that the students have to do in QBU is to learn Vietnamese. However, teaching and learning a language is not merely teaching and learning that language's sounds system and grammar rules. In this paper, the authors will focus on the way that the teachers use to teach Vietnamese for the Laotian students in the relationship with communicating culture.*

Key words: *Laotian students, cross-cultural connection, Vietnamese.*

TÓM TẮT: *Thời gian qua, nhiều trường đại học, các tỉnh của Lào đã cử cán bộ, giảng viên, sinh viên sang Trường Đại học Quảng Bình (QBU) với mục đích học tập và giao lưu văn hóa trong khu vực Đông Nam Á. Những sinh viên Lào đến trường đại học của chúng tôi để học tập và nghiên cứu. Để dễ dàng cho các mục đích đó, điều đầu tiên mà họ phải học ở QBU là tiếng Việt. Tuy nhiên, dạy và học một ngôn ngữ không chỉ đơn thuần là dạy và học hệ thống âm thanh và các quy tắc ngữ pháp của ngôn ngữ đó. Trong bài báo này, chúng tôi sẽ tập trung vào giới thiệu cách dạy tiếng Việt cho lưu học sinh Lào trong mối quan hệ với văn hóa giao tiếp.*

Từ khóa: *Sinh viên Lào, văn hóa giao tiếp, tiếng Việt.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, many universities and provinces in Laos have sent their staffs, lecturers, students to Quang Binh University (QBU) with the purpose for cultural exchanges in Southeast Asia. Those Laotian students come to our university to study, and do research. To make it easy for them, the first thing that they have to study in QBU is Vietnamese. In this academic year, there are nearly 60 Laotian staffs and students attending Vietnamese courses.

However, teaching and learning a language is not merely teaching and

learning that language's sounds' system and grammar rules. A language has more than that. Language is a part of culture and society. What the language is and how it is used depends on the culture and society. We can't know a language unless we know the culture and society from which it comes. In order to communicate effectively in a certain language, one must be aware of the culture and society behind that language.

In this paper, we will focus on the way that we teach Vietnamese for the Laotian friends in the relationship with communicating culture. After defining some specific characteristics and the aims

of Laotian learners, we choose communicating culture as the first important aspect to teach Vietnamese for Laotian students.

2. TEACHING VIETNAMESE FOR LAOTIAN STUDENTS

2.1. Vietnamese language and its culture

According to Mr. Tran, a very famous associate professor in Vietnam [4] : “Culture is a system of material and spiritual values that people create and accumulate in their practice, interaction with environment and society.” There are two types of culture that is tangible culture (i.e. pagodas, communal houses, tombs, etc.) and intangible culture (i.e. music, languages, traditions and customs, holidays, etc.). Among those elements of culture - a bridge to connect and develop countries' intimate friendship - language is the most effective means of communicating to express people's thought, emotion, education levels. Language reflects our culture and society. Through language use, we can recognize power and social status as well as the relationship with others. Language is changeable to reflect the changes in society and culture. Language is also considered as a means of negotiating social values, establishing and maintaining the social connections that bind us together and maintaining some shared values also.

In Viet Nam, Vietnamese is the national and official language that 86% of Vietnam's population use as their mother tongue to communicate. Vietnamese is one of the main factors that contributes to make up Vietnamese culture and

communicating culture. Vietnamese people consider communicating competence as the first criterion to evaluate ones' education level as well as their cultural background. Language has a close relationship with culture. Language itself is not only an element of culture but also an important condition to enforce the development of a culture.

It is clear that language and culture have a dialectic relationship with each other. Culture influences our way of thinking and acting. We can't really learn a second language unless we learn about the culture. On the other hand, according to Sapir [5], language determines thought and worldview and that therefore, culture and society are dependent on language. He also said that language was a guide to social reality. Language comes from the reality of the culture. Language can only be understood in a particular cultural context because language is acquired in a cultural-social context and the meanings constructed are the result of interaction between the individual, the language and the culture.

Because of those above deep attachment between language and culture, we - Vietnamese language teachers- realize the importance to teach Vietnamese for Laotian students by introducing them the Vietnamese communicating culture.

2.2. Reality of teaching Vietnamese for Laotian students in QBU

In recent years, one of our main duties is teaching Vietnamese for Laotian students . To find out suitable teaching method for those special students who know nothing

about Vietnamese except quick thought and reason, we have to conduct many deep researches. Consequently, we have decided to teach them both basic vocabulary and basic Vietnamese language rules.

Years ago, we taught Vietnamese for Laotian students in the following sequences: firstly introducing phonic system, secondly teaching vocabulary, next teaching grammar, and finally improving their level by teaching them pragmatics though literature, history, mathematics, etc... This method seemed too complicated and difficult for the language beginners who have very little knowledge of Vietnamese.

Therefore, recently many conferences and workshops have been carried out to find out a more suitable method for teaching Vietnamese for Laotian students. Finally, we realized that teaching language must be accompanied with instructing them how to practice 4 skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). After teaching them a new sound, we help them practice that sound and use them in practice. Moreover, combining with teaching them sounds, grammar rules, we teach them our communicating culture because we realize that it is a very effective method to teach Vietnamese for Laotian students.

2.3. Teaching communicating culture - an effective method of teaching Vietnamese for Laotian students

As we know, the first aim of learning Vietnamese of Laotian students in QBU is to use it for their study, research and exchange their knowledge with Vietnamese lecturers. However, to

communicate successfully in Vietnamese isn't easy because Vietnamese communicating rules and culture are very complicated. The Vietnamese communicate though many channels and modes. Professor Le Ngoc Tra affirmed that [6]: *“Communicating has a deep relationship with education. Or it can be understood that education itself is communication. Without communication, there isn't education. Communication is not only a modality and means of education but also a very important content of education”*.

From the viewpoint to choose communicating culture as the main factor in teaching, we set out very clear objectives for this subject as well as build a very authentic curriculum [1], course books and a communicative teaching method.

Let's consider the way we teach them phonology as an example. Firstly, we supply them with the phonic system (consonants, vowels), syllables (first consonant, syllables, tones...). Secondly, we introduce all of the syllable systems in Vietnamese language. During the process of teaching them syllables, we introduce them some basic cultural knowledge to increase their vocabulary.

For instance: when teaching them syllables “ao”, we choose “lời chào” as the main word and explain them the mean of those syllables. Concurrently, we teach them how to say greeting in Vietnamese such as: for a person who has the same age as the speaker, we say “chào bạn”; but for those who are older than the speaker, we have to add “ạ” to express our politeness,

“chào anh (ông, bà, chú, bác, cô, dì) ạ”. These greeting rules are suitable with the customs and habits of the Vietnamese people. Moreover, communicating with older people, the speaker must say complete sentences with enough sentence components without reducing whereas he or she can do that in communicating with their friends. In brief, greeting is one of the most important culture in communicating culture in Vietnam.

The course books [2], [3] are also very authentic and theme-based composed. The topics are chosen very carefully to talk about school, family, hometown, country, history, visiting, holidays, etc... to supply as many vocabulary and culture knowledge as possible. It is hoped that through those topics, Laotian students can know more about the Vietnamese culture and people.

For example, with the topic “school”, beside composing some dialogues between teachers and students, we want to manifest some special characters of the Vietnamese people such as being very industrious, hard-working, courteous and grateful. In addition, we want to emphasize the importance of teacher career in Vietnam. The Vietnamese people have sayings that: *“Be deferential to teacher and respected for moral”* or *“One word is a teacher; half a word is still a teacher.”*, which point out the important and respectful positions of teachers.

With the topic “family”, we teach them carefully the relationship in a family and the way to address correctly to express our politeness and respectfulness. From

this, we want to implicate that we are always grateful to our ancestors and consider them as the most spiritual aspect in our life.

With the topic “country”, we want to introduce to Laotian students our magnanimous and proud history. Vietnamese people have great gratefulness to heroes and soldiers who have devoted all their life to the safe of our country.

With the topic “homeland”, we are proud to introduce to Laotian students many famous sights in Quang Binh such as Phong Nha Cave, Nhat Le Beach, etc...

In brief, after each lesson, Laotian students have more and more knowledge about Vietnamese language as well as Vietnamese culture and people. All of those serve to help them enhance their vocabulary and knowledge.

3. CONCLUSION

With the hope to help our Laotian friends to study Vietnamese effectively, we- Vietnamese lecturers in QBU try our best to become typical examples of culture for them. During our teaching process, we try to create a very friendly and emotional atmosphere. We pay much attention in our behavior, language as well as communicating culture to make the learners have a good impression on us. We want to transmit our hospitality, sincere and love to our Laotian friends because we know that our duty of Vietnamese teaching is not merely to transfer our knowledge but also to increase the friendship, solidarity, and establish the friendly relations among countries in South-East Asia.

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