position in relation to the interlocutor, which are specific to oral communication, is available. Consequently, this makes telephone communication more problematic than a face-to-face conversation. This means our telephone behavior becomes a substitute for our body language, making the words we choose and the way we deliver them much more important. This lack of visual communication often makes students who can communicate quite successfully in other situations, nervous and thereby hinders their communicative abilities. If we take into consideration the fact that most telephone talks of the Russian speakers of English are held in intercultural settings, we have to admit that the scope for misunderstanding in such situations is much greater. When cross-cultural difficulties are factored in, we come across a particularly difficult pedagogical situation.

Still achieving telephone etiquette excellence is not difficult. It just requires a little time, effort, and the proper training resources, such as the following “top ten” phone skills list:

1. Enthusiasm. It’s worth trying to convey some type of enthusiasm. From beginning to end, it definitely will be useful to show care about a person talking to. Having a positive attitude is contagious.

2. Smile. Even though being on the phone, a caller can sense a smile from a person called. Some telephone experts recommend putting a mirror on a desk to remind a person answering the phone when they are not smiling at a caller.

3. The right tone of voice. This point ties into the first two items on this list. The appropriate tone and voice inflections will create relevant impression and help a caller understand what is being told.

4. A warm greeting or opening. It is important to welcome a caller into a conversation even if being too busy.

5. A strong closing. A person called should be sure to say goodbye before hanging up the phone.

6. Avoiding company or technical terminology. Technical terms or industry jargon can put a caller in an uncomfortable position. They may feel frustrated and become impatient.

7. Not getting angry (even if the customer is). If a caller is angry about something a person calls has no control over, it is worth letting them vent and ask them questions to show care. It is a good practice to ask a caller to repeat the problem to understand it better.

8. Transferring. Transferring to someone else, a person called ought to make sure that person is available.

9. Controlling the “hold” button on the phone. There are only two big reasons to put a caller on hold: to transfer to someone else and to get information. (A survey conducted by Nancy Friedman showed that callers dislike, more than anything else relating to the phone, to be put on hold.)

10. More on controlling “hold” button. Being intended to make a caller wait on hold, for any reason, it is necessary to let them know how long they will have to wait. At the best case it is better to promise to call at a specific time and keep it without fail.

Learning some of the conventions of the language of telephoning, strategies for communicating, training how to sequence a conversation as well as raising learners’ cross-cultural awareness will allow the students to overcome the difficulties and develop their ability to hold efficient telephone conversations.

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Understanding the Politically Correct Language

Political correctness has reshaped the English language significantly over the last several decades. It touched upon the English grammar, vocabulary and communicative strategies sweeping out anything that could hint at gender, racial, social or any other discrimination. More importantly political correctness has become a linguistic norm in the English language and has changed the linguistic worldview of the speakers. This issue incorporates many interesting aspects studied by scholars of Linguistics, Culture Studies and Political Sciences (among the most interesting are works by Anna Wierzbicka and Svetlana Ter-Minasova). Professor Ter-Minasova, for instance, connects the development of political correctness as cultural, behavioral and linguistic tendency with the interest to personal inner world, rights and needs in Western philosophy.

Since we are interested in teaching modern English language and providing students with relevant communication strategies, we should bear in mind the gap between Russian and English/American linguistic worldviews. The norms of usage of gender-, race-, etc. marked semantic elements of the English language should be explained and neutral vocabulary for talking about sensitive issues should be provided. We came across with the necessity of introducing politically correct semantic variants when studying the topic of medicine with first-year Literature Studies majors of the Higher School of Economics, Moscow. Such euphemisms as “condition” instead of “disease”, “people with disabilities”, “people with special needs” or “physically/mentally disadvantaged people” instead of “disabled” or even “invalids” were introduced.

One of the main benefits in paying attention to political correctness in the English language is more profound reflection on one’s own language and
word usage. We decided to support this cultural and linguistic awareness by studying and imitating James Finn Garner’s Politically Correct Bedtime Stories (Garner 1994). In the introduction to this highly ironical collection the author explains his urge “to rethink these "classic" stories so they reflect more enlightened times” (Garner 1994, p.ix). According to the author the original stories “certainly served their purpose – to entrench the patriarchy, to estrange people from their own natural impulses, to demonize "evil" and to "reward" an "objective" "good" (Garner 1994, p. ix). Still J.F. Garner warns his readers against his own possible faults: “If, through omission or commission, I have inadvertently displayed any sexist, racist, culturalist, nationalist, regionalist, ageist, lookist, ableist, sizeist, speciesist, intellectualist, socioeconomicist, ethno-centrist, phallocentrists, heteropatriarchal, or other type of bias as yet unnamed, I apologize and encourage your suggestions for rectification” (Garner 1994, p. x).

The stories themselves provide the non-native speakers of English with a rare opportunity to see the linguistic transformations in action or even exaggerated to absurdity by application to well-known plots with archetypical characters. Here is a typical example: "Grandma, what big teeth you have!" The wolf said, “I am happy with who I am and what I am,” and leaped out of bed. He grabbed Red Riding Hood in his claws, intent on devouring her. Red Riding Hood screamed, not out of alarm at the wolf’s apparent tendency toward cross-dressing, but because of his willful invasion of her personal space" (Garner 1994, p.3 -4 ). Another example opens the story of Rumpelstiltskin: “Long ago in a kingdom far away, there lived a miller who was very economically disadvantaged” (Garner 1994, p.13).

After reading and analyzing these stories the students wrote their own stories working in groups of three or four. Both the process of work and the result were exciting and fruitful. The next step was to render some Russian fairy tales into politically correct ones. This type of work promoted student’s creativity and increased their cultural awareness.

References

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International Projects as a Way of Developing Cultural Awareness

To study English is not only to learn some grammar and pronunciation rules, but to become culturally aware, to be ready to accept traditions, models of behavior and values that are different from ours. It’s really a hard work to organize conditions for developing cultural awareness in the classroom as using only textbooks and some videos cannot provide perfect context for learning another culture.

Communicating via e-mail or by regular mail can give a chance to learn the culture through interaction, but not all the students like such an activity. Is it possible to organize such conditions when all the students of the class can feel the value of learning other culture?

Our experience showed that it is quite possible to do it with the help of International collaborative projects via the Internet.

I have been working as a member of an international teachers’ team for 3 years. It allows my students and me to join and enjoy many projects. These are the projects we have participated:
1. Tree-Planting Day Celebration (2010)
4. Holocaust Memorial Day (2011)
5. The national doll (2011)
6. TV-watching habits among teenagers (2011)
8. Global Story-writing Students(2011-2012)

Students with different level of knowledge can take part in the projects and feel successful, as the topics are different and allow choosing what is interesting for each student of the group.

The main idea of any project is to present our information in a perfect way and to learn about the other participants’ ideas. Comparing the ideas, the photos, the pictures are a great stimulus for students to learn more about the culture and the country of our project colleagues.

In 2010 my students and I, among other 6 schools from Germany, Romania, Scotland, Australia, Italia, planted the birch alley. It symbolized the friendship between our schools. Afterwards, comparing the photos of the event from different countries, my students noticed a specific choice of the trees and some special tree-planting habits. We chose birches, as a symbol of Russia, German students planted lindens, and a teacher from Scotland planted oaks.