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### CULTURE-FOCUSED TEACHING OF LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION

*This article considers certain aspects of achieving cross-cultural communicative competence by university students through culture-oriented studies of English. It describes the principles of culture-focused tuition and their implementation in the development of teaching materials using the example of a series of practical English textbooks for future linguists and, specifically, translators developed at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. Various forms of class work and self-supervised student work are discussed which ensure students take an active role in the tuition process via team work and individual work, as well as the development of responsibility for their own tuition, and the build-up of skills for self-supervised work. Rigorous selection and use of authentic, up-to-date, high-quality verbal and audio-visual material is described as an essential component of creating teaching resources. Language resources should be not only authentic: they must reflect the contemporary state of the English language, focusing on typical usage and differences between variations of the English language.*

*The article describes such assessment from the points of view of the style of texts in terms of grammatical correctness, modern or obsolete vocabulary, typical or untypical usage, stylistic colouring, the number and quality of stylistic devices and other such criteria.*

*The article also reviews the progress of cognitive studies in linguistics and their relevance for, and impact on, the methodology of language teaching. It discusses recent achievements in cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics as the basis for culture-focused tuition strategies, aimed at the development of cross-cultural communicative competence, which must be understood as a conscious and pro-active mastering by students of certain communicative strategies and tactics of verbal behaviour in a foreign language environment.*

**Key words:** *cross-cultural communicative competence, culture-focused teaching, communicative strategy, teaching principles, teaching resources, background knowledge, linguo-cultural and socio-cultural knowledge.*

**Formulation of the issue.** English is generally seen as an international language, the most repeated names being *Global English, World English, Common English, Continental English, General English, Engas* (English as associate language), or *Globish* [1]. This tendency has increased pace since the spread of the British Empire and its social legacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and perhaps accelerated with the internet, where English is the lingua franca. Many sectors such as International Business and scientific discourse predominantly use English.

A core problem is that the many variations treat it as a preference and not a proscribed language. None of the countries that use a variation of English, such as the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia or New Zealand have an Academy or Institute that oversees and regulates their variation of the language.

There is still a consequent societal demand for teaching foreign languages, focused on English as a means of international communication in such countries as China and Japan, for instance, that, has brought to life the necessity of both a theoretical understanding of the approaches to foreign language teaching and its practical implementation at schools and universities. In particular, we must focus on the necessity of creating teaching resources for culture-focused foreign language tuition.

**Short review of publications.** It is of utmost importance for all teachers of English in Ukraine to ensure that our pupils and students are able to communicate freely and accurately in English without being hampered by factors that needlessly block their understanding. This area is studied extensively by many schools of linguistics, including that of linguistic relativity which proposes that the cognitive perception of a language affects the ways in which its respective speakers conceptualize their world in their world view, which in turn shapes their cognitive processes. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has two key aspects: that language determines thought, and that linguistic categories limit and determine our cognition, while an alternative view states that linguistic categories and usage influence thought and certain kinds of non-linguistic behaviour [2: 84].

This process that underlies the teaching of linguistics in general, and translation in particular, has been based in Ukraine on a dominant approach to translation as a science and machine / computer translation as "applied science" or "applied linguistics". These are disciplines which can be found in each Ukrainian university syllabus of linguistics. The corresponding mentality of Ukrainian speakers is reflected in the impossibility of differentiating between "a science" and "an art" in the Ukrainian language using just one word; respective meanings can be only accurately translated by using descriptive word combinations – "точна або природнича наука" and "гуманітарна наука". Hayek, Nobel Laureate, succinctly described this tendency:

"The persistent effort of modern Science has been to get down to "objective facts," to cease studying what men thought about nature or regarding the given concepts as true images of the real world, and, above all, to

discard all theories which pretended to explain phenomena by imputing to them a directing mind like our own. Instead, its main task became to revise and reconstruct the concepts formed from ordinary experience on the basis of a systematic testing of the phenomena, so as to be better able to recognize the particular as an instance of a general rule"[3: 143].

This is scientism [4; 5; 6] and it has significantly influenced the teaching of language and translation, whereas many linguists, including the author of this article, believe that translation, in particular, is first and foremost an art. A translator does not so much translate as skillfully render. This scientific approach to language and translation is, in our opinion, highly reductive and even harmful, as it takes out of the equation individual language users, as well as the culture they represent. Understandably, such an approach has long become outdated in the West and in this country.

In this respect it must be noted that the cognitive approach to language in recent decades has evolved into a socio-cognitive approach, which defines language as "a system of signs resting upon a conceptual system that is relatively unique to each culture [7: 401]. The famous Hungarian scholar I. Kecskes further shares the view of other authors that "culture is seen as a socially constituted set of various kinds of knowledge structures that individuals turn to as relevant situations permit, enable, and usually encourage. It is a system of shared beliefs, norms, values, customs, behaviours, and artefacts that members of society use to cope with their world and with one another" [ibid.]. He further writes that "culture cannot be seen as something that is 'carved' in every member of a particular society or community. It can be made, changed, manipulated, and dropped in the course of interaction. Culture has fuzzy boundaries, and is characterized by dynamic changes both synchronically and diachronically. The conceptual system of individuals directly influenced by culture includes encyclopaedic knowledge that refers to the knowledge of the world as distinguished from knowledge of the language system. This conceptual system plays a profound role in how human beings make sense in communication" [7: 402].

At the same time, language is dynamic and constantly changes, and tradition and familiarity can drive change in language, or not, depending on context. An amusing example of this is how the borrowed word "dynamo" (динамо) has become outdated and become replaced by "generator" (генератор) in the Ukrainian language. Kyiv has a football team called Динамо Київ (Динамо-Київ) named after the dynamo factory, itself now renamed the *Київський експериментальний завод*, but the football team never renamed itself correspondingly.

Hence, providing such conceptual knowledge of the world which is shared by individuals belonging to the same culture in the process of teaching language and translation to students, must be viewed as a crucial task, which makes cross-cultural competence and culture-focused studies an inseparable and, in fact, the principle component in teaching language and translation at universities. The key problem is in accommodating such dramatically different cultures such as those of, for example, England, Scotland, the USA, Canada, Australia and South Africa, and that invariably leads to the deep problem in making textbooks better and more effective. This goes much deeper than avoiding obsolete slang, archaic language and seriously out-dated grammar and sentence construction. The very way that people learn English is greatly dependent on the socio-cultural factors. These fundamentally influence their perception of language and communication, and consequently their ability to learn accurately.

Nations and regions of our planet still have fundamentally different approaches to the socio-cultural interpretation and use of the stimuli that bombard us. The largest group is of course the area of China and the Chinese language group which has a population of over one and a half billion, some 20 % of the planet. The languages used by that bloc comprise a Sino-Tibetan macro-language with 13 main sublanguages, yet they generally have a common socio-cultural perception by their users.

The Indian sub-continent of also some 1.5 billion people has two language groups, Indo-European and Dravidian, and 1,652 mother tongues. Here, the Indian Constitution recognizes English as a common language for official use. But yet again, common socio-cultural factors unite the many ethnic groups and languages.

The job of comparing and contrasting ethnic groups and nations, their cultures and their socio-cultural identities is highly complex but essential. The issue of learning language and culture simultaneously has been studied by many Ukrainian and Western academics majoring in linguistics and translation studies, as well as in philosophy. The postulate of the necessity to translate not only from "language to language" but also from "culture to culture" has for a long time been a cornerstone in theoretical education and the practical training of future translators.

Yet the issue of forming communicative competence by means of culture-focused teaching at universities for future linguists and translators as a comprehensive systematic phenomenon has not so far been studied in detail. This is true of both its theoretical aspect as well as its practical aspect of writing textbooks and course books to teach mandatory or optional sub-disciplines at an advanced level and, in particular, practical courses of English textbooks for Bachelor's and Master's students.

The notion of cross-cultural communicative competence as the ability by an individual to achieve successful communication in a cross-cultural environment for future translators, transforms into a capability through a set of skills to ensure that such communication is achieved between representatives of different cultures. For such intrinsically-involved parties, communication is mediated and the translator becomes the mediator, and in fact is

needed as such, since the participants involved in communication may lack knowledge of the TL as a foreign language and the variation of the culture with which they are dealing.

A culture-focused approach in teaching a foreign language as a mandatory discipline when educating future skilled workers in given fields presupposes the acquisition of linguistic, cultural and socio-cultural knowledge and the development of communicative skills by future linguists and translators. Such skills should be based on the rules and the standards of verbal and non-verbal communication as accepted in the language community of the language being studied. In this context, culture must be understood as a broad term: it is not only language and national or ethnic specifics, but also includes consideration of profession, age, gender, and religion. In fact, a whole field in pragmatic studies has developed in the last two decades related to the above named issues with two distinct lines of research, those of cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics [7]. I. Kecskes, a major academic in these two fields, compares them in the following way: "While cross-cultural pragmatics compares different cultures, based on the investigation of certain aspects of language use, such as speech acts, behaviour patterns, and language behaviour, intercultural pragmatics focuses on intercultural interactions and investigates the nature of the communicative process among people from different cultures, speaking different first languages. Cross-cultural pragmatics analyses the differences and similarities in the language behaviour of people representing different languages and cultures. Intercultural pragmatics, however— a relatively new discipline— is interested in what happens when representatives of different first languages and cultures communicate using a common language" [7: 400].

This may be well demonstrated in marketing, where Demographics which uses simple categories (age, nationality, earnings, location, etc.) is now primarily replaced by Psychographics or "Lifestyle Marketing" where lifestyle attributes and traits are assessed and incorporated in company strategy. Consumers may have a common language but widely-differing lifestyles and cultures.

Every step in the evolution of the above fields of studies underpin the practical task of building the communicative competence of university students, especially those who are learning skills to deal with a foreign language. Students should not only build up appropriate cultural background knowledge, but also be capable of applying it to context-specific communication situations. And communication should be understood as both oral and written communication. Thus, students must actively use varied communicative strategies and skills to ensure success in their future profession.

"The purpose in teaching translation, – says Natalia Bashuk, – is the acquisition of specific translator's competences, by which we understand the knowledge and skill sets necessary for translation as an activity: these are first and foremost bilingual, communicative, psycho-physical, and technical competences, as well as the personal characteristics of the translator. When translating, they must be capable to focus, mobilise all their potential and memory resources, be capable to switch their attention, to switch from one language to another, from one culture to another" [8: 47].

Thus the development of cross-cultural communicative competence by students of Translation Departments must be understood as a conscious and pro-active mastering by such students of certain communicative strategies and tactics of verbal behaviour in a foreign language environment.

This purpose may be achieved by many means, including using authentic, up-to-date, high-quality verbal and audio-visual teaching resources. Such culture-focused tuition should again be understood broadly not only as tuition in class, but also as self-supervised tuition, which recently has been given more attention in Ukraine. It must be based on the syllabus and be monitored by the tutor. The selection and composition of such authentic materials to be used in teaching must be based on certain culture-focused teaching principles which we discuss below.

**The results of the research.** Such principles for teaching a foreign language, which are fundamentally agreed with by the author, were described in general terms by such Ukrainian academics as V. Byalyk, M. Zubilevich, O. Kasatkina, T. Lyashko, T. Skubashevskaya. These principles in combination with some others, were used for the methodological concept and teaching methods approach when writing a series of textbooks of practical courses of English under the title "English for Translators and Linguists". The series, aiming at Bachelor's and Master's students at Linguistics and Translation Departments of universities, was written by a group of authors at the Department of Theory and Practice of Translation from English at the Institute of Linguistics of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. The series was published in repeated editions and has been successfully used for many years in teaching English at that university and many others. Crucial to this approach was the incorporation of material from a native speaker and their continual monitoring of the cultural effects of material provided by Ukrainian authors.

The unquestionable quality of language material and background knowledge offered by this series of textbooks was considered by its authors as one of the most important principles of culture-focused teaching. Textbooks were targeted at students who have mastered English at least at the upper-intermediate level and who have chosen linguistics and translation as their profession, hence the requirement for high standards of language material as used in the textbooks.

Language resources should be not only authentic: they must reflect the contemporary state of the English language, focusing on typical usage and differences between variations of the English language. It was not an easy task to assess the quality of language material, which is always a challenge for a non-native speaker. The issues involved the appraisal of the style of texts in terms of grammatical correctness, modern or obsolete vocabulary, typical or untypical usage, stylistic colouring, the number and quality of stylistic devices and other criteria.

Such assessment was necessary as it is unacceptable to introduce language units of different levels that are out of date, infrequently used, limited to a particular area, or simply erroneous. In general terms, these may be summarised as those linguistic units that are non-typical and uncharacteristic for modern English usage. The eminent Ukrainian translation theoretician Vyacheslav Karaban says in this respect: "Translation is the re-creation of a text that was written according to usage in the source language into a text that is written according to the usage of the target language. Hence teaching usage in both the source and the target languages becomes an important aspect in training translators, as the translation process involves both usages. In translators' education, not enough attention is paid to this fact. Students are mostly taught language systems and standards, whereas the usage in both source and target languages is taught insufficiently and non-systematically" [9: 25].

Teaching up-to-date usage can be achieved only when relying on the best examples of modern fiction and journalism. Thus, the use of texts from Dreiser, Galsworthy, Maugham, Jerome, London, Priestley, Christie, Montgomery, and Fielding, however good these authors might be for learning the history of English and American literature, is not justified for the purposes of teaching modern English usage and language in general.

The described above objective was achieved in this particular textbook series [10; 11; 12; 13; 14] with the assistance of Alexander Haponiev, a British native speaker, graduate of Manchester University and other higher educational establishments, who helped to select texts from the whole bulk of modern English and American literature, and who wrote a whole number of texts for the purposes of this textbook series and edited the English part of it.

Excerpts were selected according to the topics of the syllabi from such famous contemporary authors as Bill Bryson, Dan Brown, Minette Walters, Scott Adams, Julian Barnes, Terry Pratchett, Ian Rankin, P. J. O'Rourke, Jeremy Paxman, John Simpson, Michael Crichton, John Le Carre and others, as we believe that the language used by these authors reflects the current state of the English language and the spirit of our times.

The original texts are accompanied by vocabulary notes and culture-focused comments which significantly broaden the linguistic and cultural knowledge of students, and in many instances help to root out certain false stereotypes existing in the mentality of Ukrainians about the life and culture in English-speaking countries. It is important also for students majoring in translation that the textbook series offers translations of culture-specific vocabulary. Such translations may have been made using either descriptive or analogous methods, transliteration or transcription, or combined forms of the above. The use of a huge quantity of language and cultural information is invariably believed to add to the cognitive processes which students undergo. The enhancement of such processes is considered as one of the principles of culture-focused teaching [15: 432].

The same principle is also realised through the tasks where students have to research certain issues in accordance with the syllabus topics using all available resources, such as, for instance, TV / film and the Internet. The same purpose may be achieved by using audio- and video-materials directly linked to the textbooks, telling students about life and culture in English-speaking countries. These must be carefully selected feature and documentary films, television programmes and others, the viewing of which in class in limited amounts must become an inseparable part of the tuition process, as it is difficult to overestimate the cognitive value of such an approach. YouTube can be an excellent source of material while at the same containing vast quantities of dismal, low-quality content as well as propaganda from Russian trolls. Thus, the importance of careful selection cannot be underestimated. We must note in this respect that unfortunately Ukrainian students do not on the whole have the habit of watching news, films or television programmes in the source language in the necessary quantities without strong motivation from their lecturers. It can also be very difficult for them to appraise content quality.

Partaking in an active role in the tuition process, when students are encouraged in class to express their feelings and use their personal experience and background knowledge, constitutes another important principle of culture-focused teaching [15: 432].

The textbook series implements this principle through a set of introduction-into-the-topic tasks where students are encouraged to communicate their thoughts and feelings on certain issues, using language knowledge and skills already in existence, as well as their background knowledge and personal experience. The tasks also include exercises to develop productive skills through the discussion of the topics studied at the end of each section, when students sum up their knowledge and correct their judgements based on their newly-acquired vocabulary and cultural knowledge. Speaking in class is also focused upon, by students giving presentations to their peers. At the same time, the cyclic principle of tuition is in place, which ensures that students deepen their cultural knowledge and improve their language skills in certain topics which focus on country studies, culture, and politics, as well as various language aspects at each new stage of learning.

Role-play tasks in each section of the textbook series further help to implement the principle of student involvement in the learning activities, as such tasks set out to imitate real communicative situations by describing the situation of communication, specifying the roles of the participants and their objectives. Examples of such role-play include a court hearing based on audio material taken from a CNN panel discussion, or political debates on certain specified topics where roles and other communication parameters are identified.

The principle of student involvement in team work and the development of responsibility for their own tuition, the build-up of skills for self-supervised work is realised in both group and individual projects, which are so far a relatively new and unfortunately sparsely-used form of learning activity in Ukraine. The respective tasks may be found in each unit of the textbook series and become of especial importance in the MA students' education. Examples of such work include presentations on specific topics with the use of multi-media and other means, individual and team research on certain topics related to the teaching syllabus that widen the linguo-cultural and socio-cultural knowledge of students, and writing a review, for example, of a book of fiction, a film or a theatrical performance. Such projects may be aimed at the development of a set of skills for academic work, such as group presentations on the variations and dialects of the English language, or writing a review of an academic work. The students then present the results of their team or individual work either in writing, by way of a report, an essay, bullet-points, or audio-visually by way of a presentation.

**Conclusions.** Culture-focused teaching, as we can see, may be put into practice through different forms and varied teaching methods. Such teaching uses language and culture-focused resources of different degrees of complexity depending on the target audience and the objectives it pursues. The effective use of such teaching means and methods may result in the achievement of the final goal of cross-cultural communicative competence of future translators, whose direct professional goal is to mediate in communication and render material between the representatives of different languages and cultures. Further research in this area should focus on the methodology and practice of implementing the principle of culture-focused teaching in the tuition of different disciplines with different sets of goals and audiences.

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#### ***Возна М. О. Культурологічний підхід до навчання мовам та перекладу.***

*Стаття розглядає певні аспекти формування міжкультурної комунікативної компетенції в підготовці майбутніх перекладачів з акцентом на культурологічному підході до викладання іноземних мов, розглядаються принципи такого навчання та їх запровадження в написанні навчальних матеріалів на прикладі серії підручників з практики англійської мови, розроблених в Київському національному університеті імені Тараса Шевченка. В статті також аналізується розвиток когнітивних студій в лінгвістиці з точки зору їх впливу на методологію та методи навчання іноземним мовам та перекладу на філологічних та перекладацьких відділеннях університетів.*

**Ключові слова:** міжкультурна комунікативна компетенція, культурологічний підхід до навчання, комунікативні стратегії, принципи навчання, навчальні матеріали, фонові знання, лінгво-культурні та соціо-культурні знання.

#### ***Возна М. О. Культурологический подход к обучению языку и переводу.***

*Статья посвящена некоторым аспектам формирования межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции в подготовке будущих переводчиков с акцентом на культурологическом подходе к преподаванию иностранных языков, рассматриваются принципы такого обучения и их применение в написании обучающих материалов на примере серии учебников по практике английского языка, разработанных в Киевском национальном университете имени Тараса Шевченко. В статье также рассматривается развитие когнитивного направления в лингвистике с точки зрения его влияния на методологию и методику обучения иностранным языкам и переводу на филологических и переводческих отделениях университетов.*

**Ключевые слова:** межкультурная коммуникативная компетенция, культурологический подход к обучению, коммуникативные стратегии, принципы обучения, обучающие материалы, фоновые знания, лингво-культурные и соціо-культурные знания.