

Conference Paper

Multiculturalism in Terms of Linguodidactics: Analysis of Foreign Language Textbooks

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Abstract

Based on foreign language textbooks, including Russian, this article discusses the contrasting cognitive attitudes of the authors (the tendency to ethnocentricity and multiculturalism) which determine strategies used to select and structure the textbook content. The article determines, defines, explains and exemplifies the strategies of monoculturalism, biculturalism and multiculturalism typical of languages textbooks which they use to present linguistic, linguocultural and country study information to foreign learners. Monoculturalism strategy is understood as the attempt of text-book authors to depict only the worldview of the country whose language is being studied and to describe the facts and realia belonging to this linguoculture without their comparison with those from other language worldviews; biculturalism strategy is a certain selection and structuring of learning materials when two interrelated cultures, native and foreign, are compared; multiculturalism strategy is based on the comparison of different conceptual and language worldviews and on the attempt of authors to depict relations between different languages and cultures. The article underlines the efficiency of the cognitive strategy of multiculturalism in the development of intercultural communicative competence, which is the target in language learning.

Keywords: foreign language textbook, textbook in Russian as a foreign language, Russian as a foreign language, monoculturalism, biculturalism, multiculturalism, ethnocentricity

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1. Introduction

Researchers, seeking to establish congruity between education and demands of modern society, underline the importance of two diverse tendencies: ethnocentrism and multiculturalism. This problem should be solved in the sphere of linguistic education on scientific-methodological and linguo-methodological levels. In the **theoretical and methodological aspect**, it is necessary, from the point of view of linguo-cognitive science and psycholinguistics, to describe cognitive mechanisms at the heart of two

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mental processes: rejection or acceptance of new and abilities to adapt to alien/strange. In linguo-methodological aspect it is important to single out strategies of information presentation suitable for cognitive peculiarities of learners. L.E. Vesnina and I.V. Kirilova write that, "... it is necessary to focus on the content of the main teaching aids, a textbook in particular, as its materials determine the axiological vectors of the whole learning process in the linguistic sphere. Cultural and linguistic information included in a textbook should be true to life and describe modern reality of the country whose language is being studied" [1].

The aim of this research is to determine cognitive attitudes of learners in presentation/acquisition of foreign linguistic culture and presentation strategies in the textbooks in a foreign language.

2. Methods

Analysis of teaching aids representing cognitive attitudes of learners in presentation/acquisition of foreign linguistic culture is carried out with the help of general scientific methods (observation and description, analysis and synthesis, explanation and generalization, induction and comparison); methods of theoretical research (sampling and structural and functional methods); linguistic methods of contextual and conceptual analyses [2].

3. Research Material

Material for this research includes textbooks in foreign languages, including Russian as a foreign language.

4. Discussion and Results

Ethnocentrism is a desire of a person belonging to a certain culture to comprehend and evaluate phenomena and facts of another culture under the lens of standards and values of their own culture [3]. Such attitude may lead to cognitive and emotional discrepancy, to a negative attitude to traditions and customs of other ethnic groups and may result in confrontation with others.

Phenomenon of ethnocentrism is natural from the cognitive perspective: when learning new facts, people often compare them with what they already know, what is typical and habitual for them. It is one of the basic cognitive mechanisms of any human being,

so ethnocentric comprehension of phenomena of another culture is an obvious and natural feature of a human.

In the sphere of linguistic education we may confront bilateral ethnocentrism: from students learning a foreign language and from teachers who try to fill in the gaps in the linguo-cultural knowledge of foreign students in a short time. A mindset to ethnocentricity is found in monocultural approach to presentation of linguistic and cultural facts in the textbooks in a foreign language. For instance, one of the Czech textbooks for foreigners [4] includes 47 texts, but only 4 (less than 10%) of them are based on a cross-cultural dialogue: the first text describes the opportunities of the Czechs to spend weekends in Paris; the second text gives statistics about the Czech culture bearers living outside the country; the third text provides information about Mozart and the first night of his famous opera “Don Guan” which took place in the Estates Theatre in Prague in 1787; the fourth text is devoted to fashion “with a French touch”. Three other texts cover universal topics of the global scale: problems in ecology, world trade and growing crime level (these texts have negative axiological potential). All other texts describe the Czech history, culture, literature, language and general problems that the Czechs face today. Despite its undoubted merits, the textbook presents a tendency to ethnocentrism, which, as it has been mentioned above, is quite typical, explainable and clear. From the point of view of structuring and selection of teaching materials, such cognitive attitude correlates with **the strategy of monoculturalism**, which is understood as **a desire to present the worldview typical of the language studied and to provide only those facts that are connected with the linguistic culture of the studied language disregard of their correlation with other linguistic worldviews, without their comparison with the phenomena of other cultures.**

A teacher of a foreign language is a medium that ensures communication between languages and cultures. That is why it is important for every teacher to overcome the natural inclination to ethnocentrism, but at the same time they should help students understand the phenomenon of ethnocentrism (i.e. to bring it to the zone of conscious perception), and overcome it in order to develop an adequate comprehension of another culture embodied in the studied language.

The modern conception of language education, “with its communicative and anthropocentric tendencies”, assumes that “the study of a language, particularly its structure, should not be isolated from a speaker, a person bearing cognitive signs and peculiarities of national mindset; its aim is dialogue between cultures” [5].

The dialogic principle, as a quality of thinking and cognition and as a feature of linguistic education, is found in the strategy of biculturalism. Methodological and technological tools in such approach to teaching include selection of teaching aids and texts to emphasize cross-cultural links in the language and in the world. **The strategy of biculturalism is a certain way of selection and arrangement of teaching materials (language units, texts and cultural facts) to represent two worldviews and two linguistic cultures -- native and foreign.**

Teaching a foreign language with this strategy is quite efficient in a monocultural environment. Besides learning the language and facts about the culture, this approach helps to develop cross-cultural competence, the importance of which is convincingly summed up by T. V. Larina, "Teaching students national styles of communication and their acquaintance with extralinguistic facts helps to represent communicative behavior of people of other culture in the form of an integral and logical system, it helps to overcome ethnocentrism, to develop cross-cultural communicative competence that includes the ability to interpret and assess communicative behavior of interlocutors guided by the features of their culture, not one's own, and the ability to consciously adapt one's communicative behavior to foreign context" [6].

A good example of the strategy of biculturalism is textbooks in Russian as a foreign language for the Bulgarian schools called "Matryoshka" [7–9]. Linguo-cultural dialogue in these textbooks is found on different levels: on the level of presentation of language forms which are compared to the features of Bulgarian and on the level of description of cooperation in literature, science, tourism industry, everyday life, etc. For instance, the textbook for the 5th grade represents cultural dialogue on the basis of lives of the famous scientists. One of the texts tells about the prominent Russian medical doctor who worked in Bulgaria during the Ottoman-Russian war and operated on the Russian and Bulgarian wounded soldiers. Another text describes the discovery of lactic acid bacteria by the Bulgarian student Stamen Grigorov. The talented student was noticed by the famous microbiologist Ilya Mechnikov, director of the Pasteur Institute at that time, and he invited Grigorov to the Institute to study. No doubt that such approach describes the links between two countries, it has a deep educational potential as it gives students knowledge about the role of scientific discoveries and it teaches them that science has no political or national borders [7].

A dialogue between cultures is found in the texts about literature: for instance, in the textbook for the 7th grade they describe friendship between two great poets of Russia and Bulgaria – Konstantin Balmont and Emmanuel Popdimitrov (unfortunately

the authors did not include any poems in the textbook). Here is a transliterated extract from the text:

Sovremennye tekhnologii dayut nam mnogo vozmozhnostey obshchat'sya na rasstoyanii. No ran'she lyudi tozhe umeli podderzhivat' takoy vid druzhby, tol'ko dlya etogo oni ispol'zovali obychnye pis'ma i posylki. Primerom podobnoy druzhby «na rasstoyanii» mogut sluzhit' otnosheniya izvestnogo bolgarskogo poeta Emmanuila Popdimitrova i russkogo poeta Konstantina Bal'monta. Oni poznamilis' v nachale dvadtsatogo veka, kogda Bal'mont posetil Bolgariyu, i ikh otnosheniya bystro pereshli v krepkuyu druzhbu. Oni ostalis' druz'yami i posle togo, kak Bal'mont uekhal iz Bolgarii. Dolgie gody poety podderzhivali druzheskuyu perepisku. Popdimitrov posylal Bal'montu knigi i poznamil ego s bolgarskim narodnym tvorchestvom. Sostavlennoe Popdimitrovym sobranie bolgarskogo pesennogo fol'klora leglo v osnovu knigi perevodov Bal'monta «Zolotoy snop bolgarskoy poezii. Narodnye pesni». V rezul'tate svoego prebyvaniya v Bolgarii i druzhby s Emmanuilom Popdimitrovym Konstantin Bal'mont vyuchil bolgarskiy yazyk i perevodil s bolgarskogo na russkiy yazyk [10].

[Translation of the extract: Modern technologies give us a lot of opportunities to communicate over a distance. But in the past people could keep in touch too, using letters and parcels. An example of such friendship “over a distance” is relationship between the famous Bulgarian poet Emmanuel Popdimitrov and the Russian poet Konstantin Balmont. They met in the beginning of the XXth century, when Balmont visited Bulgaria; their relations quickly turned into close friendship. They remained friends even after Balmont had left Bulgaria. For many years the poets wrote letters to each other. Popdimitrov sent Balmont books and introduced him to the Bulgarian folk art. A collection of Bulgarian folk songs by Popdimitrov was translated by Balmont and published under the title “A Golden Sheaf of Bulgarian Poetry. Folk Songs”. During his stay and thanks to his friendship with Popdimitrov, Balmont learnt Bulgarian and later translated from Bulgarian into Russian].

A textbook based on multicultural approach to presentation of the language and culture is the textbook for the 11th and 12th grades of Bulgarian schools named “I Know Russian Perfectly” [10, 11]. The authors describe phenomena of the Russian culture in their relation to the world culture, and they underline the global nature of some problems and phenomena. In the unit “How we communicate” there are two texts about love between the world-famous and talented people. One of them tells about the love between Vladimir Vysotsky and Marina Vlady, and the other describes the relations between John Lennon and Yoko Ono. These texts do not simply present love stories of the people in art, but their emotional context arouses respect to such relations

and helps readers to understand how important and valuable love is in the lives of all people.

The Bulgarian textbooks in Russian as a foreign language pay much attention to linguo-cultural information, since many texts are connected with different spheres of culture and everyday life. In the unit “Problems of a modern city” there are texts about European, Japanese and Russian cities like Moscow and Tula. In the unit “Musical jigsaw” they describe different current musical trends and countries where they were born (R-n-B, break dancing, hip hop, etc.). Also, there are texts about classical music (Mozart), about the famous British violinist Vanessa-May and about Alexey Vorobyov from Russia who has had a staggering musical career, having won several Grands Prix in the Russian and American musical contests. The description of national culture in the context of the world culture is, in our opinion, the best approach to presentation of linguo-cultural and country specific information in the textbooks in a foreign language. **The choice and structure of linguistic and cultural texts that reflect links between different languages and cultures represent the strategy of multiculturalism.** No doubt that in the multicultural groups of students this strategy is the most productive.

5. Conclusion

The textbooks in a foreign language may use three strategies in selection and presentation of language, linguo-cultural and culture specific information: the strategies of monoculturalism, biculturalism and multiculturalism. The choice of the strategy is determined by different factors: the type of a group (monocultural or multicultural), goals and aims of education and the period of learning. However, there is a social demand for multicultural competence development in younger generation. Hence, the most productive educational strategy is the strategy of multiculturalism, which contributes to the establishment of good relations between different cultures.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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